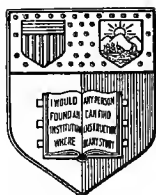


A

LITHUANIAN VILLAGE

LEON KOBRIN

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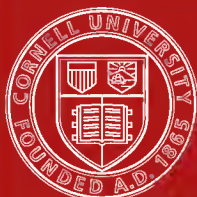
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A LITHUANIAN VILLAGE

A LITHUANIAN VILLAGE

BY
LEON KOBRIN

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
FROM THE YIDDISH
By ISAAC GOLDBERG, Ph.D.



NEW YORK
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PUBLISHERS

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INTRODUCTION

Leon Kobrin, who belongs with David Pinski and Sholom Ash among the foremost writers in contemporary Yiddish literature, was born about forty-seven years ago in Vitebsk, White Russia. As early as his fifteenth year he had begun to write sketches and tales in Russian. Emigrating to the United States in 1892, he commenced the following year to pen stories in Yiddish, based upon the New World atmosphere, which he was one of the earliest to bring into Yiddish letters. For, during his first six years in this country, he engaged, with as little patience as success, in shirtmaking, breadbaking, weaving and newspaper-selling; all this time his chief desire was to devote himself exclusively to literature.

It was with his first book, "Yankel Boila and Other Tales" (1898) that he won recognition from critics on both sides of the ocean. Professor Wiener of Harvard, who has since abandoned his Yiddish studies, hailed the author as the Yiddish Gorki. Successive productions in fiction ("Ghetto Dramas," 1904; a nine hundred page collection of tales, 1910; the novels "The Immigrants," "Mother and

Daughter," "The Professional Bridegroom," "The Tenement House," "The Rise of Orre") picture the multiform phases of tenement life and ghetto adventure in the new land, with their exotic milieu and their peculiar psychology.

As a pioneer in Yiddish literature in America, Kobrin will always be remembered as the discoverer of the tenement. He and Libin have been called by their associates the twins of the tenement, because of their preoccupation with the many themes furnished by East Side life in the early days. Kobrin has a deep sense of the environmental influence of the gloomy structures upon the dwellers, so that his numerous tales possess a certain historical interest. For a whole generation, indeed, Kobrin and Libin dominated Yiddish letters on this side of the Atlantic. They both began with the sketch and the short story, thence to the drama and finally to the novel. In Kobrin may be studied the evolution of immigrant psychology, from his homesickness for the "Old country," to the direction of that yearning upon himself, and by a natural process, the formation of a strong nationalistic feeling.

The author's dramas number some two dozen, and the end is not yet. Of these a surprising number has been successful, although upon the stage he seems too ready to strain the truth for a situation. Without a doubt, however, Kobrin has had a wholesome in-

fluence upon the Yiddish drama, having followed the Gordin tradition and fought unceasingly for "playwright's rights" as against managerial dictatorship. His first play, "Minna" was produced in 1899, having been written in collaboration with Jacob Gordin, the leader of the realistic reaction against the fatuities and the absurdities of the Goldfaden imitators at their worst. His second play, "The East Side Ghetto," played in the same year, brought to the attention of the play-loving public the talents of Bertha Kalich, who has since achieved a reputation among English playgoers. It was on the occasion of the production of "Two Sisters," 1904, that Israel Zangwill wrote a very favorable report of the play in the New York *Herald*, later meeting the author and requesting him to translate into Yiddish "The Children of the Ghetto." When that work was done and the play presented in Yiddish for the first time, Zangwill enthusiastically exclaimed to the translator, "Now I realize that I have translated you—not you me!"

"Three years ago," said Kobrin to an interviewer in 1915, "I organized all the playwrights, about twenty altogether, into a society known as the Jewish Playwrights' Association. Our mutual aim was to make the dramatist independent—to make it possible for him to express himself freely as he feels, and not as the manager expects him to." A further insight into the writer's independent stand is afforded by an in-

teresting detail in the history of his play "Children of Nature." (The play, by the way, is founded upon his early tale "Yankel Boila," and was several years ago produced with great success in a Russian version, at the Moscow Art Theatre.) The Yiddish version was accepted in 1912 and rehearsals were begun. The author had received seven hundred dollars in advance royalties. At one of the early rehearsals, however, the manager showed a disposition to change the plot—a phenomenon not unknown to the English "boards." Kobrin could not see the point, despite the manager's most earnest protestations. The latter, as a final resort, exclaimed that unless the author conceded the issue he could take his play back. Whereupon the playwright took the play back and returned the seven hundred dollars. Other managers proving just as obdurate, Kobrin decided to produce the play himself, and surely enough, when it was given at the Odeon Theatre on the East Side, its immediate success justified the author's confidence and persistency.

Kobrin's labors as a translator, in which he is fortunate to have his wife's collaboration, have resulted in opening up to Jewish readers a very wide field; besides having translated "Faust," "Hamlet" and some of the works of Echegaray, he has done the complete tales of Chekhov (4 volumes); Tales

and Short Stories by Turgeniev (4 volumes); the complete works of de Maupassant (18 volumes); Hugo's "Les Miserables" (5 volumes), and Gorki's short stories (3 volumes).

It is Kobrin, I believe, who may be said to have "discovered" Gorki outside of Russia. He had noticed in a Russian publication the tale "Makar Chudra," signed by a then unknown name; he at once translated it for the Yiddish "Zukunft"—a New York publication that has few rivals of its kind in the near-by English magazines. It was Kobrin who brought Gorki to Professor Wiener's attention; the latter, on his return from a visit to Russia for the purpose of collecting material for his book upon Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century, brought back with him the first three volumes of Gorki's works, which were later put into English by Isabel Hapgood.

With particular reference to "A Lithuanian Village," it is worth while noting that almost immediately upon its appearance it was hailed by Yiddish critics as one of the jewels of the literature. Although Kobrin, in his short stories (which more than the work of most Yiddish writers exhibits that sense of interest and climax considered indispensable by the English reader) is often brutally realistic, he has in this charming idyll produced a work of rare atmosphere. Like some of his own tenement dwellers, he

seems for a time to have been seized with a nostalgia for the Old World. Yet it is an Old World that points to the New.

This is the first of Kobrin's books to appear in English.¹ It represents but one aspect of the versatile author's gifts,—a rare aspect, and by no means the least attractive. Several, at least, of his novels and plays, as well as a large number of his short stories, should appeal to that part of the English public which is gazing toward wider literary horizons.

ISAAC GOLDBERG.

Roxbury, Mass.

August 1919.

¹ Two one-act plays by Kobrin (which may hardly be said to be representative of his dramatic work) have appeared in my *Six Plays of the Yiddish Theatre* (Second Series).

A LITHUANIAN VILLAGE

I

THE VILLAGE OF B——

SOMEWHERE in Lithuania there once nestled the little village of B——. It boasted a population of several hundred Jewish souls and a score or more of Gentile peasants; it had a market and shops; an old, gloomy Polish church in the middle of the market-place; a Jewish apothecary who would have been reckoned by his fellow Jews as a Gentile, only that he appeared in the synagogue at New Year's services and upon the Day of Atonement; a Jewish teacher with an excellent handwriting, who taught all the flourishes of calligraphy, in both Yiddish and Russian, to the boys and girls of the community, at twenty-five kopeks per month; a Rabbi, or as he was there called, a dispenser of justice; a couple of slaughturers; a money-lender; a pair of cantors; a public bath and several synagogues, begging pardon for mentioning the profane and the sacred in the same breath. In addition there was a Gentile police-sergeant,—a veritable emperor in his domains.

All the village Jews were "business people," and made their living by dealing with the peasants of their own village and the surrounding communities. In truth, theirs was a poor existence, but illuminated by a great faith in God, and just such a life as their forebears had lived. They asked no greater favor of the Lord than that their police-sergeant should have a soft heart and a willing palm. . . . And the Lord ever showed Himself indeed prodigal with His mercy, and never withheld His bounty from the Jews of B——, sending them always sergeants with soft hearts. And the Jews gladly crossed his palm and praised and thanked their Father for His favors. So that theirs was a happy existence! . . . They ate bread and groats, sometimes with milk and sometimes without. That was for week-days. For the Sabbath and the holidays the good Lord betimes sent a fish or two and a piece of meat.

Nor were the wives of these Jews barren women. The male population was much at home, so that children were not lacking, and there was always some celebration or other in honor of a newly born son. They sent their sons to Hebrew school and to Old Frankish instructors, where they received a small portion of the Holy Law and a great deal of spanking. Having finished Hebrew school the sons would either open a place on the market or else go off to try their fortune in a nearby town.

As to the girls, they were kept at home until they were married. Unless, if one were particularly ill-favored, she would be sent to a large city, to a dress-maker, there to learn the trade, or be placed as a domestic servant.

On the whole, however, the Jews of B—— lived content, knowing that there was a God in heaven who had provided for their fathers and grandfathers before them, who provided for the world, and who would surely not forsake them, either.

And when one of the Jews was marrying off a daughter the Lord came to his aid, sending him all he needed for the purpose, through a promissory note, a loan from the money-lender, or at times through a pure miracle. In short, no one could need or wish for a life more peaceful and content.

This peaceful contentment was disturbed only when a new sergeant was appointed to the district. At such times a terror fell upon the Jews of B——. Suddenly they would dwindle in stature, bend their backs, walk shrinkingly along, looking about them with fright in their eyes, just like pursued animals. Until the sergeant showed his soft heart. . . . Whereupon they would again breathe freely, straighten their backs and resume their life of peaceful contentment, their hearts filled anew with an abiding faith. . . .

This quiet was disturbed also when anybody in the village died. The whole population would turn out

for the funeral,—relatives and strangers, friend and foe,—and the air would ring with the moaning and lamentation of the women. Even greater was the lamentation in the village when the local youths were summoned to the military examination. At such times the mothers would run to the cemetery and beat upon the graves of their departed, begging the dead with cries of despair to save their sons. Frightful wailing echoed through the streets, in the synagogues and in the homes. . . .

Many of the sons were unfit, with scabby heads, or were ruptured, lame, twisted, crippled, consumptive; these were termed defectives and emerged with white tickets,—exempt.

Those young men, however, who were sound and sturdy, and who were taken into the service, were looked upon, at their return to the village after their term had expired, as even more defective than the exempted weaklings. The local mothers, indeed, were far more willing to give their daughters in marriage to a lame young man than to a robust youth who had been a soldier. For it seemed, somehow or other, that the youth had lost his Jewish character in the service; he returned from the barracks a different person entirely; he walked differently, talked differently, and looked altogether different from the usual young man of the community. . . . To make matters worse, they used to return from the army dis-

sipated and wanton, and it had happened more than once that a soldier had led a respectable daughter astray. One of the girls had been forced to flee from the village.

Sometimes,—but rarely,—it happened that the routine of the village was disturbed by something of a totally different nature; as, for example, a dispute among the Jews over the merits of the Rabbi,—over a slaughterer, over a cantor's voice, over the public bath, or over the matter of precedence in being called up to the altar to read from the Bible. . . . A dispute of this sort naturally did not last long; after the right and the wrong side had slapped each other's faces in warm fashion,—after a couple of minyans ¹ of countenances had been well scratched and a score or more fingers had almost been bitten off, the weaker side thrust a few rubles into the sergeant's fist. And once that potentate had delivered his judgment, there was not a Jew in B—— who dared question the decision.

¹ A minyan is the quorum of ten males above the age of thirteen required for all religious functions.

II

SUMMER

IN summer the village was bedecked with green. . . . It lay in a valley: on the one side at the foot of a dark forest, which looked down upon it with most mysterious mien from a hilly eminence; on the other, at the bottom of an old Polish cemetery which was situated on a green hillock, with its gaunt tombstones and costly monuments, beneath which reposed the Polish lords of long ago. . . . The burial-ground looked down upon the village with a mien even more mysterious than that of the forest on the other side. . . . The sky above the village was clear: at times a deep blue, like a calm sea, and at others girdled with red bands. When the sun set, certain windows seemed to glow with a red flame, while others sank into gloom. When the sun rose, the woods seemed to catch fire; the cross on the Polish church in the market-place glittered; the tombstones and the monuments of the Polish cemetery shone as if they were spattered with gold, and waves of warmth and light streamed over the village. . . . And when the moon rose over the dark forest, the tree-tops were

spangled with a sparkling dust, and the whole hamlet,—its market, its roofs, its church and its cemetery,—seemed to be covered with a shimmering powder. . . .

Summer brought lively times to the village. Upon the broad, dusty, unpaved streets the Jewish children ran about in play,—boys and girls together, barefoot, with dirty faces, some with fat little bellies under their long, four-cornered, fringed scarf or under their soiled skirts. The urchins, with their exposed shirt-tails flapping about, scampered around like frisky calves, fought with each other, wept from childhood blows, or played for buttons. The girls sat in the sand or on the green mounds of turf before the houses, casting their dice made from the bones of animals. The older boys were at Hebrew school, and from the open windows of the *cheder* came shrill, piping voices, in a sing-song together with the Rabbi, droning the words of their primers or their Bibles. . . . The mothers,—those who were not dragged into town during the week together with their husbands, sat upon the turf-mounds, mending and sewing, darning socks upon a glass, or embroidering tablecloths. Or again, others,—the business women,—stood in their little booth-shops, or upon the market-place near a table laden with bread, various tid-bits at a *groschen* apiece, and *kvass*. The fathers, those who had no occupation, sat near their wives in the

stalls, kept a sharp eye for customers, and sighed; others were in the synagogues discussing "politics." . . . The grown-up Jewish daughters, who performed the household duties, went about in slatternly fashion, with tattered skirts, many of them with their shoes upon bare feet, and others with feathers from the bedding in their hair. . . . If a young man should pass by, there would appear at one of the windows a head of disheveled hair and a pair of black, fiery eyes. If the black eyes encountered those of the young man, they would withdraw bashfully, and a hand suddenly hastened to arrange the disordered hair. And when the young man had disappeared, through the open window there would come wafting a song in which a maiden's soul poured forth its hidden longing.

III

A SUMMER SABBATH

THE selfsame maidens, however, looked altogether different on Sabbath eve, at the blessing of the candles, when their fathers returned from the public bath with wet temple-locks and dripping beards, their faces red and steamy. Their mothers had closed the shops on the market-place. When the young ladies had tidied up the home, ready for the Holy Sabbath,—had stored the evening meal away at the back of the oven,—had hidden the Sabbath soup under a pillow to keep it warm, had sprinkled the floor with a golden sand, decked the table with a white cloth, and set upon one end of the table a pair of shining candlesticks with the candles in their places, and at the other end two loaves of home-made white bread under a white towel, and had lighted the lamps,—then, too, the maidens cast off the week-day spirit from themselves as well. Their faces were washed; their eyes sparkled more freely, and into the braids of their combed hair were woven gaily-colored ribbons; in their starched dresses many of them looked as if they were indeed possessed of a new soul,—the soul of the Day of Rest.

The sun goes down. Some of the windows flare up with a fiery red, and others are darkened by gloomy shadows. The forest and the Polish cemetery seem moodier than ever. . . .

In the Jewish homes the women are reciting the blessing of the candles. After this prayer, while the parents and brothers of the girls are still at the synagogue, the maidens appear upon the street, stand about their houses, chat with their companions or play with a small brother or sister. . . . Their bearing and even their gait is different, and if a young man acquaintance passes by, they look at him more boldly, and their voices ring more freely, louder than ever. . . .

For they are in their Sabbath, holiday mood; they feel it, and they look it. The entire landscape has assumed a Sabbatical air. . . . All the houses are illumined, and through the windows may be seen the bright, cheery beams of the candles, which seem to escape into the street and engage in combat with the dark shadows that the summer evening casts over the village. The thicker and darker the shadows become as they spread over the hamlet, the more strongly and brightly shine the beams of the Sabbath lights through the windows of the Jewish homes, and the more cheerful and exalted are the eyes of the Queen of the Sabbath that gazes through the windows.

Over the market-place, too, hovers the Holy Sab-

bath. Everything is so quiet, so peaceful. The shops are closed,—the tables removed. No careworn Jewish face is visible, nor can a Jewish groan be heard. Quiet and peace. The market-place is asleep, resting from its week-day cares. The hens of the Gentile peasants, and their brood, the Gentile geese and ducks, who were pecking all day about the shops and tables, left the place before nightfall. Only “Jewish” goats wander now among the closed stalls; nobody drives them away, so that they, too, feel the spirit of the Sabbath and strut about calmly, undisturbed, free; and when the desire moves them, they stop short before a shop and peacefully rub their beards against the door. . . .

Night has fallen. The forest and the Polish cemetery seem to have receded from the village into a deep darkness. . . . Stars have been lighted in the sky. They, too, sparkle differently than on week-day nights. Jews come forth from the synagogue. They walk along at ease, their wives and sons at their sides,—one with his coat slung across his shoulders, another with both hands thrust into his sleeves, a third with his hands folded behind his back. Step by step, ever so leisurely, they walk along, as nonchalantly as if there were no cares upon earth. . . .

“Good Sabbath!” echoes the street with cheery voices. “Good Sabbath!” echoes in the houses.

“Good Sabbath!” whisper the little candle beams

through the windows, it seems, to the twinkling stars in the heavens. "Good evening!" . . .

And soon every Jew has welcomed to his home the benevolent spirits of the Holy Sabbath. The wife softly hums the chant of the prayers as her husband intones them, and the pious daughter hums it, too. And the raisin-wine, or the sweet mead, poured from the Sabbath beaker and tasted by everybody in the house, contains every flavor. . . . And later, when the head of the house sings the Sabbath songs, his voice sounds so free, and his sons join him, and the wife and daughter chime in, too, humming softly or accompanying the melody in their thoughts. . . . All sorrows would be forgotten when the Sabbath came to the village. The Jewish street, the Jewish home, the Jewish soul,—all rested when Sabbath came.

The day was particularly eventful for the girls, since every Saturday they went walking in the woods. They walked in pairs, and reaching the forest would sit down upon the green carpet in the shade of the trees. Through the trees would come a noise of young men acquaintances, playing there at "butter-tarts." Older men and women, who had come thither on a walk, would sit on the grass, facing the young men and laughing at their antics. The girls would begin to sing a Jewish folk-song, whereupon the young men grew silent, soon appearing from behind the trees, looking upon the maidens and smiling fool-

ishly. . . . The girls would turn their eyes away, arrange their hair more becomingly, glance down upon their bosoms, pluck the grass aimlessly and sing, sing. . . .

All at once one of the young men takes up the tune,—then a second, and a third, and soon all in chorus, and the voices of the girls and the youths blend, intertwine, caress and kiss. . . . The older folk join in the tune with a nasal humming, and the blue sky over the dark crowns of the trees seems to sing with them. . . . There is an odor of dried hay mingled somewhat with that of grease, for deep in the forest there is a grease factory. A Gentile of the neighborhood, who works at the factory, appears amongst the trees, stops, and looks on, while a broad smile plays over his features. He listens to the singing, thrusts his black, shining shocks of hair under his cap, scratches the nape of his neck, and laughs heartily, showing his white teeth. Then he turns to a girl who looks healthier and sturdier than even he, and cries “Ah! You sing well, Cheike!” And he gives her a pinch in the breast. Whereupon a shrieking laughter bursts forth among the girls, who scatter like geese. The older folk commence to scold the impudent rascal.

“You ought to shame yourself!”

The young men look upon the factory hand with a sort of envy, and smile in confusion. The Gentile

youth explodes into a roar of deafening laughter and continues on his way. There is no more singing, however. The girls gather more closely together, and whisper secrets among themselves, bashfully; they strike their shoulders against their companions, pinch one another, stifle with laughter, laugh aloud, scream and glance furtively in the direction of the young men. The young men return the glances, gazing especially at robust Chayke, who screams louder than the rest. The young men's laughter becomes now more spirited, more nervous, and suddenly they begin to wrestle with one another, throw each other to the ground, roll over the grass, exhibit all their tricks, walk on their hands, stand on their heads and bark like dogs. . . . The girls continue to laugh and scream louder and more shrilly than ever, and the forest echoes their cries. . . . Thus it continues till the evening meal. Then the groups break up and go homeward.

They cross the market-place in pairs, in threes, and even in fours; boys and girls separately, and both the youths and the maidens are still under the spell of the forest. During all the way home the sides send signals,—the girls to the boys, the boys to the girls, letting themselves be heard or their presence felt, casting glances, making grimaces, uttering sudden screams, shrieks, bursting into laughter and dashing about. . . .

If the maidens meet a familiar Gentile boy they greet him so freely, so unrestrainedly; they smile to him, jest with him; and if he stops to chat with them, one of the girls pulls his coat-tails, another his sleeve, a third slaps him across the shoulder, and all of them smile at him and are ready to play with him. . . . The freedom which the Jewish daughter displays toward the Gentile youth has not been revealed in her bearing toward the Jewish young man.

At such times, when the Jewish young men meet a familiar, barefoot Gentile peasant-girl, they jest with her: "Who gave you the bloody nose?" they ask. Whereupon she feels her nose with her rough fingers for signs of blood, then laughs and exclaims good-naturedly, "May the wolves devour you!" And should they permit themselves greater freedom with her, she answers with a slap over the hands and loud laughter. . . .

The market-place is still at rest; the shops are still closed, as the Jewish boys and girls come home from the woods with their noisy chatter. The doors of the old, gloomy Polish church are already open; they are preparing for worship. A few peasants of either sex, in their white smocks and their bast shoes, have arrived early from the neighboring hamlets; they sit on the ground near the church, waiting. The men smoke their pipes and spit out in silence. The women, their heads covered by kerchiefs of plain

white or of flowery designs, converse in soft tones, as if telling secrets. . . . Hearing the loud laughter of the familiar Jewish youths and maidens, they look up and greet them dumbly with a nod. The passing girls reply to the greeting with friendly smiles, adding "Good evening! . Good evening!"

Behind the church, storks are hopping about on their long legs. From an open window yonder peers out a Jew in a skull-cap, covered with feathers from the bed from which he has very evidently just arisen. He strokes his beard in leisurely fashion, yawns in the same carefree manner and wrinkles his forehead. Another Jew with a yellow matted beard, wearing a winter coat from beneath which may be seen the yellow, grimy edges of his fringed scarf, is standing at the gate to his home, scratching himself with his left hand under his right arm-pit, making grimaces and complaining: "Ay-va! Such hot weather! Good heavens!" A Jewish woman in her Sabbath bonnet runs out of the house and shouts to her unwilling son to come right in and do his reading from the Dicta of the Fathers. And there sits a mother with her children on a turf-mound, telling them tales about ghosts and spirits, about miracle-workers and the thirty-six saints. An elderly man with his coat-tails gathered up is chasing a goat and calling to it. "Zhig! Zhig! Zhig!" Another is driving away from his gate a pig which has smelled something there and is rooting it up

with his snout. The man waves his hands at the animal, stamps his feet, seizes a missile from the ground and shouts, "Off with you! Off with you!"

Here and there a goat is lying upon one of the turf-mounds, scratching his beard and his back, raising his head and beginning to chew something. Across a high fence a cat is making its way, humping its long back, curling its tail, shaking its light, transparent ears, rubbing its white whiskers against its paws and rolling its yellow eyes. Two elders come by, obviously engrossed in a deep problem. Both walk slowly, their beards clutched in their fists, their foreheads furrowed in thought. Perhaps they are discussing "politics,"—Bismarck and Beaconsfield; or perhaps some knotty problem in the Gemara, altogether. . . .

A young Jewish mother, in her Sabbath clothes, rests upon a mound with an infant in her arms, dancing it up and down, singing and laughing to it in the utmost glee. Small children with washed faces and combed hair are playing before their houses. The shirt-tails that stick out from the urchins' trousers are still white and clean; the little girls' dresses have not yet had time to be soiled. . . .

As soon as the children spy their elder brothers and sisters returning from their stroll, they dash toward them with a glad shout, surround them and press close to their knees. The faces of the older brothers

and sisters shine with a certain zest, and are covered with perspiration; their eyes, however, glow happily. And the father, seeing this, scolds his son.

“The idea of such a husky chap running about all day long. Better stay home and do your Sabbath studying in the Dicta of the Fathers!”

The mother looks at her boy and sighs. “How ruddy, how healthy! He’ll surely be taken as one of the Czar’s soldiers!” . . .

And to her daughter, at such times, the mother exclaims, “You’re a regular Gentile peasant-girl! See how you are sweating! You must have been raising Cain!”

And the father, naturally in harsh accents: “She ought to be thoroughly spanked,—the wanton,—so that she’ll remember!” . . .

But no sooner has the daughter,—“the wanton,”—“the Gentile peasant-girl”—turned away, than her parents, naturally, glow with pride and tell each other, “What a beauty! May no evil eye gaze upon her! What a beauty! She shines like seven suns!” . . .

The sun sinks lower in the west. Soon it will set. The village gathers in the synagogue to say the sunset prayer. The daughter remains at home, puts an apron over her Sabbath dress, and prepares the table for the closing Sabbath meal. She prepares the table and dreams her maiden’s dream. . . . The

dream peeps out through her eyes, blushes across her cheeks, hovers over her lips. . . . She beholds a youth, running about in the forest with fiery speed, wrestling with his companion, and displaying superhuman strength,—such strength! . . .

And the youth, who has gone to the synagogue, thinks also of the forest, of the maidens, and dreams of their faces, of their eyes, their singing and their laughter. . . .

And now the men have returned home from the sunset prayer. All sit around the table and eat the closing meal of the Sabbath. The father begins to sing from the Sabbath songs. The sun has set. Suddenly there resounds over the village a metallic ringing,—Ding, Dong!—that trembles through the air in a long monotone. . . . The Sabbath Spirit of Rest among the Jews gives a shudder, and a melancholy yearning descends upon them. . . .

The bell of the church begins to ring, and reverberates through the village with its alternate long and short tones: Ding, Dong! Ding, Dong!

And its solemn, metallic notes mingle with the deepening shadows that night scatters through the village, and the tones penetrate into the Jewish homes, into the Jewish souls, and rouse within them an even greater melancholy, a greater yearning,—their week-day cares. . . .

The Jewish father begins to sigh; the mother looks

worried anew; the sons are distraught; the daughters are sad. . . .

Later the men return to the synagogue to say the evening prayers. All the Jewish homes are dark; the Jewish daughters cast off their Sabbath finery, remove the colored ribbons from their hair and sigh into the darkness. The church bell booms again, and how mournfully its tones vibrate through the gloom,—with what soulful melancholy they echo in the dark Jewish homes out of which the Holy Sabbath has departed. . . .

The stars have begun to twinkle in the sky. But they do not sparkle as joyfully as they did on Sabbath eve. . . .

In the windows of the Jewish homes lonely little lights have begun to appear. Voices are heard upon the street. “Good week to you! Good week!” The voices, however, echo with cares. . . . And soon from every house arise the prayers that end the Sabbath and call upon the Lord’s blessing for the coming week. A few moments later may be heard the hoarse rattling of keys on the market-place, where the Jewish men and women are opening their shops. Here and there sounds a Jewish groan. . . . Sabbath is over. The Spirit of Rest has departed. The week-day soul alone remains. Care has awakened,—care and worries. . . . Sabbath is over! . . .

IV

THE WEEK IN SUMMER

UPON the disappearance of Sabbath the village again donned its drab week-day garb. The mothers and fathers resumed their places in their shops and behind the counters at the market-place, sitting with earnest, careworn faces, dreaming their week-day dreams,—so trifling, so sad, so gray, so insignificant,—and yet so great and important to them!—The worm that creeps among the graves in the graveyard, dreams, perhaps, such dreams as theirs. Rarely did these people laugh, and if laughter came from their throats, it was a curt, choppy laughter in which echoed a groan. Mottel, son of Channe-Dvayre, the “politician” of the village,—a Jew with a yellow, pointed beard and darting, sparkling eyes, who wore a warm shawl around his neck from the middle of July until the Day of Atonement in September, because he was also a cantor and must guard his voice from a cold,—this Mottel was the only cheerful fellow on the whole market-place. Often he would sit before the door of his shop, his shawl tightly wound about his neck, telling the other

shopkeepers in a loud voice that Israel Beaconsfield was a greater statesman than even Bismarck. And that was why England, and not Germany, to this day held the keys to the ocean in its own treasury. And if England wished to, she could lock up the ocean and ruin the world. . . .

And the men and women shopkeepers, when they heard these tales, marveled at Mottel's deep mind and his broad learning; upon the careworn faces and in the eyes haunted by sorrow there glowed a pleased expression. For the great Beaconsfield was *our* Israel Beaconsfield. . . .

Should there appear in the midst of these diplomatic discourses, a Gentile peasant in his linen shirt and his heavy boots, with a moist, fuzzy beard and scraggly hair sticking out from under a new, peaked hat, just purchased, the men and women shopkeepers who had been engrossed in "our" Beaconsfield would forget him at once. Even Mottel himself forgot. All would make a dash toward the peasant, with Mirke, daughter of Avrom-Layzer, in the lead. Mirke was a long, lank woman with a yellow face and a head-covering that never sat straight. In the village she had a reputation as a shameless creature, because of her sulphurous language, and also because all the year round she quarreled with every other shopkeeper over matters of livelihood. Behind her came the agile Mottel, the statesman, with his

inseparable shawl around his neck, followed by all the rest. They surrounded the peasant and seized him, one by the coat-tails, another by the shirt, a third by the sleeve, this one before him, the other behind. And the contending shopkeepers dragged the peasant toward their respective shops, their shrieking voices filled with entreaty and almost with tears.

The peasant struggled, squirming in all directions, tearing himself loose from one and thrusting the other off. And when his brand-new hat fell from his head of scraggly hair, he flew into a fury altogether, glowered at Mirke, who happened to be pulling him by the sleeve, and spat squarely into her face, giving her a powerful thrust. Whereupon out of anger Mirke spat into Mottel's face and tore the scarf of Mottel's wife off her head; Mottel's wife, in confusion, threw herself desperately upon another shopwoman, and by this time the peasant had rescued his cap from the ground; he started off on a run, and, as it happened, flew right into Mirke's arms. She, with her head-covering already on her shoulders, panting from exertion, dragged him at last into her booth.

Now the others resumed their seats before their places and wiped their faces with bare hands; the women rearranged their disordered head-coverings and crooked bonnets; Mottel readjusted the shawl around his neck. For a few moments they continued to curse one another, all uniting to curse Mirke, until

the peasant emerged from the shop with a package of tobacco and something else in a parcel. . . . Then they all accompanied him with sorrowful countenances, and with envy in their hearts tried to guess how much Mirke had profited by his purchase. . . .

Thus they sit from early morning until late at night before their little establishments and their tables, and seek their livelihood, if it may be called such. The sun may burn, the wind may blow hot, sandy gusts into their faces, into their eyes,—but there they sit. . . .

The forest casts dark shadows over the village. The sitting figures merge into the shadows that steal gradually from the Polish church down into the valley. A hot day expires; a new, cool night is born. The night dies. Another hot day is born, and life in the village goes on just as it went yesterday,—just as it went a year ago, decades ago. . . .

And like decades ago, over the forest, after a warm evening rain and preceding a hot day, floats a mist, and the newly risen sun gazes through the mist like a red flame through the dust-covered glass of a lantern. As the day is very hot, some Jewish youngsters are going bathing with an older man, in the little stream that flows just outside the village, across from the Jewish cemetery. Then does the welkin ring with young, mischievous cries, and from the virgin forest nearby little birds rise in flight, with a frightened

tweet-tweet. They fly out, see the naked mischief-makers in the stream, and soon return to their nests, disappearing into their verdant little world. . . .

And from the other side of the stream, from the hill where the shepherd tends his sheep, behind the trees, comes the shepherd's song, while his dog's barking echoes far and near. They cannot say whether he barks from pleasure at his master's voice, or because he hears the noise yonder by the stream. And opposite, under the fence around the Jewish cemetery, is Orre Trahle, the caretaker of the burial-ground. He is lolling on the grass, both knees stuck out and his long, yellow fringed garment visible from behind his trousers. His coat is fastened by safety pins. He is a fellow with a red, perspiring neck under a thick, wild, scraggly black beard, wearing a cap with a broken peak. In his mouth is a long pipe-stem, at which he sucks, burrowing with his finger into the clay bowl. He gazes at the naked youngsters who are performing all manner of antics in the stream.

At the water's edge stands a father, holding his little son by the hand and trying to pull him into the water. The pot-bellied little fellow, about six years old, tears himself from his father's grasp, stamps his little feet and cries:

"I don't want to! I do-n't want to-o! I'm afraid! Ooh! Pa-a-pa! . . . "

The father takes the child into his arms, and when the latter begins to struggle with his hands and legs, the parent holds his legs and walks into the water with the juvenile objector. At once, however, he turns back. "Ay! 'It's cold!" He stops, sets the child down on the grass and walks back into the water himself. He stops at the edge, places one hand on his hairy chest, sticks the other into his arm-pit, stands thus for a while, looks at the water, then at the children who are performing all sorts of tricks, and mutters to himself:

"Regular evil spirits! Little demons!" Then very cautiously he advances one foot into the water and makes a wry face. "Ah, Ay!" Whereupon he turns to a man nearby. "Pretty cold, isn't it?" The latter, already bathing, replies, "So so!" And he stops both his ears with his fingers, closes his eyes and suddenly submerges himself, leaving only a black lock of his hair visible, soon reappearing with a red face, his beard and temple-locks dripping, and howling as if he were steaming on the board of an indoor sweat-bath. . . . Meanwhile the other Jew, praised be the Lord, has thrust his second foot into the water. But the urchins are at play about him, chasing one another, "ducking" one another's heads into the stream, splashing one another. A splash strikes him, and he starts, crying, "Oh, you little jail-birds! You demons!! I'll kill you, good-for-nothings, reptiles!

You're liable to drown a man, God forbid! This is a river, you little ragamuffins!" The children shriek with laughter, and one of them turns a somersault in the water, disappears, sticks his foot above the surface and soon emerges with a red, dripping countenance, eyes shut, his hands clasped over his forehead, shaking his head and his ears, splutters, and shouts so zestfully, shrilly, merrily, swimming then back to the other youngsters, who are floating on their backs, suddenly flopping over on their stomachs, performing paddle-strokes, "treadwater" and other antics. . . .

The man in the stream shouts to the Jew who has just scolded the youngsters, and who is preparing to immerse himself.

"Did you see the tricks that Mirke's wild son was doing? Some day he'll get drowned."

"May he take his mother with him," replies the man addressed, thrusting his fingers into his ears, shutting his eyes and—splash! Thank Heaven, the first ducking over with, he passes his hand across his wet beard and the water is no longer cold. . . .

And the Jewish maiden, when nobody is there, steals over to the stream,—steals over on tiptoe with a companion, and her black eyes dart about uneasily in every direction as she casts off the garments from her pure, white body; and when the sun gazes upon her nakedness the maiden huddles together, bends over, abashed before the light, before the sun, the

sky, the trees,—before all the surrounding world of light and verdure, and steps thus into the murmuring water. . . . And the young shepherd, hidden by the trees, looks from the hillock,—stretched out upon his stomach, the handle of his whip against his chin,—down upon the naked girl in the stream,—gazes, smiles and wags his head. He cannot hold in, however, and thrusts his head from between the trees, calls to the girl by her name and falls to whinnying like a colt. . . . The maid utters a startled cry; she seizes her companion by the arm; the companion seizes her similarly, and both lower themselves into the water as far as their necks, look around with frightened eyes at the shepherd, cry out at him, scold him, and when he begins to laugh louder and more lustfully than ever, they commence to creep on all fours out of the water, with flaming cheeks and eyes brimming with shame; they crawl thus to their clothes, wrap their garments about them and bend down close, close to the ground, to dress. And when they have dressed they both arise, point their fists at the Peeping Tom and shower him with epithets. He, too, has risen, snapping his long whip at them, laughing and whistling. Suddenly the companions clasp each other, burst into laughter and run back to the village.

When Tish B'Ab (the 9th of the month of Ab) came around, the rivulet, even as decade upon decade

before, would hear horrifying lamentations from the Jewish cemetery across the way, where Jewish women lay upon the graves of their dead, wailing; where stood men with snow-white beards, their heads resting against the tombstones of their departed wives, murmuring prayers; where the youngsters, whose hearts bounded with the springtime of life, not caring to know of sorrows or of death, climbed up the trees above the graves and robbed apples. . . .

And shortly before the Solemn Days, even as decade upon decade before, the heavens hung gray and gloomy over the forest, and out of grayness at times came the long-drawn, angry caw of a crow; the village was redolent of the gathered produce of the surrounding fields,—of ripe apples from the neighboring orchards,—of fruit for the local Gentile neighbors,—of the heavy depression that came to all the Jews there with New Year's Day and the Day of Atonement. . . .

And upon the countenances of the men and women shopkeepers would fall a preoccupied earnestness; every heart would turn to God's mercy, entreating a prosperous new year to be written down against their name, and sealed, and every heart trembled before the Lord's wrath. . . .

Not a curse could be heard, nor any scolding. Folks were afraid to curse when heaven was astir with preparations to write and seal the fates of all,—and

earth bustled with purification from sin. All did their utmost to bury their evil feelings toward their neighbor until the awe-inspiring days should pass. . . .

Even as tens and tens of years ago, so the fear of God at this season would daily wax greater and greater; the very sky above the wood, it seemed, became dark and lugubrious with terror, the sun took flight from fear, and the forest, together with the entire ambient, became clouded with awe.

The nights were without a moon,—pitch dark. The dwellings and the shops lay as in a deep, black abyss. And the little lights in the windows gleamed from afar, like the eyes of wolves in a black forest; the Polish cemetery hovered like a strip of heavy fog over the sunken hamlet, while from the woods was wafted an uncanny rustling over the village; one after the other, indistinct shadows stalked from the market-place carrying the glimmering lights of their lanterns, and soft footfalls were audible in the vicinity of the shadows and the flickering flames. Subdued sighs, too; and, in all this, Jews could discern the imminence of the awe-inspiring holy days.

V

THE DAYS OF PENITENCE

THE older children, too, became more pious during this season; they were more fervent in the recitation of their prayers, and shunned all transgressions. Particularly did they avoid such transgressions as were punishable by having their years cut off in their prime.

A youngster is standing in prayer. Into the lower windows of the house peers a gray, cloudy morning. The child is about ten, pale and thin, wearing patched trousers through which hangs the grimy tail of his shirt. In his hands is a prayer-book, and he recites with deep fervor, in a loud voice. His mother enters from without, exhausted, bearing a small basket; she is likewise pale, of small build, and still young; a shawl is thrown over her shoulders and a kerchief over her head, completely hiding her hair. She deposits the basket upon the table and begins to extract cookies from its depth, counting them in a whisper. The reckoning concluded, she replaces the cookies in the basket and glances about uneasily at her younger children, who are still asleep: one in a crib and two

upon a couch. She must hurry to the market-place and set her little stand. All the shopkeepers are already in their places and she finds it impossible to tear away from the house, for the children must be dressed and given their meal. Her husband is away in the village of Kalyeda and will probably return to-day or to-morrow with a little produce. At any other time she would burst into cries and curses against her children, because they "snooze" so and do not allow her to get away. To-day, however, so near to the New Year holidays, she fears to be angry, and however much she is tortured by the thought that she is probably losing business by this delay, she masters her indignation, approaches the slumbering children, caresses them, and wakes them with a voice that throbs with tenderness.

"Get up, children! A good, good year to you, my fledglings, I'm late on account of you! . . ."

And while she is occupied there with her younger offspring, who have by now awaked, and washes their faces with a moist towel, reciting "I confess" with them, the little ten-year-old continues saying his prayers from the devotionary and every moment glances furtively at the cookies in the basket. The contents fascinate him and confuse his thoughts. In his little heart the Evil Spirit contends with the Good.

"How sweet they smell! Steal one!" urges the Evil One.

"You mustn't. That's theft. Such a sin on the very eve of New Year's and the Day of Atonement!" admonishes the Spirit of Good. And the youngster turns his back upon the tempting morsels, shuts his eyes and prays in a voice louder than ever.

"You can tell your mother afterwards, and ask her forgiveness. How tasty, how sweet!" persists the Spirit of Evil. He recalls the cookie that he furtively abstracted from the basket several weeks before, and can still taste its sweetness. At length he reaches a decision: he will take it only this once and then he'll confess to his mother and beg her forgiveness.

He steals backwards to the table, his eyes distended in fearful surveillance of his mother, sticks his hand behind him and fumbles around for the basket, thrusts in his fingers, withdraws them cautiously with a cookie and quickly conceals it under his fringed garment,¹ next to his bare bosom. Then he resumes his praying, but in a confused manner, no longer as ardently as before.

His mother has left with the basket. The youngster has finished his prayers and has gone into the street with his cookie. He is on his way to the *cheder*² and can feel that the stolen sweet has fallen

¹ Worn by all orthodox males.

² Elementary Hebrew school. Literally, the Hebrew word for "room."

down to his abdomen, where it has been caught in his fringed garment. As he proceeds, he debates with himself: To eat or not to eat? Yes, eat! No, not eat! It tastes so nice! But it's such a sin! Just in spite of the Evil Spirit he'll not eat it! Just in spite! But how sweet it tastes! "I'll tell mama: 'Mama, I took a cake. . . .' Took? Stole! Stole!" he begins to scold himself in his thoughts. "That is theft! Fie! On the eve of New Year's and the Day of Atone-ment you've committed a robbery! . . ."

All at once he catches sight of a playmate on the way to the same cheder,—little Shlayme, "the wild creature," Mirke's little rat, a child of the same age with a scratched face, a torn cap on his head, bare-foot, and a grimy shirt-tail likewise flapping out of his trousers. And the said Shlayme is really a wild creature. Wherever there's a fence, he's sure to be climbing over it. No sooner does he spy a billy-goat than he must mount him for a ride. He must hang from the rear of all passing carts. If he detects a tot with a dainty, he must snatch it away. He clamb-ers in the orchards, stealing apples. At the synagogue he always becomes involved in fist-fights with the other urchins and always emerges with a well-scratched visage. Now, however, just before the Solemn Days, Shlayme has reformed, and has become as meek as a dove.

He accosts Shlayme.

"Shlaymekele, I've got a cookie!"

"Where?"

"Right here."

He taps his belly.

"Give us a piece!"

"I mustn't. . . ."

"Why?"

". . . Mustn't. . . ."

"Mustn't share a cookie? Why?"

"'Cause I mustn't. . . . I took it on the quiet."

"Ooh!" cries Shlayme, with a start. "Before New Year's? Thief! . . ."

"Not from a stranger. From my mother."

"You're a thief just the same. . . . You mustn't. You die early for doing that. Just ask the Rabbi and you'll see. Hurry, give it back!"

"I was ready to go myself and give it back. That's just why I told you I mustn't share. . . ."

"A big cake?" asks Shlayme suddenly. "You're watering to eat it, ain't you? Let's have a look at it! . . ."

"I mustn't," and the speaker shakes his head, breaking into a bee-line dash for the market-place.

His mother is already at her place beside her stand, which is laden with cookies, candies, and kvass.¹

¹ A thin, sour beer, commonly made by pouring warm water on rye or barley and letting it ferment.

He rushes over to her and halts bruskiy, brings forth from under his garment the cookie, which is warm from contact with his body, and hands it to his mother without looking at her.

"Where did you get it?" she asks, after the cookie is already in her hand.

"Took it," he stammers, bringing his slender arm to his face, rubbing his nose against it and commencing to sob.

"What are you crying for? . . ."

"I took it from your little basket," he continues to sob, while his arm has already reached his forehead; from behind it he eyes his mother with a twitching face, awaiting the slap.

But to-day his mother does not slap him. At any other time she would have flayed him alive, heaping curses upon him, crying: "The idea! Such a blood-sucker! With what labor she earns a kopek. . . ." To-day, however, she merely says,

"It isn't nice, my son; it's a sin,—on the eve of New Year's. . . . I would have given it to you myself. . . ."

And this kindly speech, instead of the blow he expected, upsets him entirely and he cries more than ever, with deep contrition, with genuine repentance and all his heart. . . .

Then his mother caresses both his cheeks. "Hush, hush, you won't do it again." She wipes his nose

with a corner of her skirt, presses the cookie into his hand and says:

“There, now; go to school, a sweet year to you!”

He left her with sparkling eyes. He was no thief; his years would not be cut off in the middle; and he had the cookie, anyway! . . .

For sheer joy he began to kick about like a calf, and the soiled tail of his shirt danced after him. . . .

The shopkeepers sat now before their booths deeply absorbed in thought.

A peasant woman and a maiden passed by, the former with a brass kerosene-vessel in her hand and the latter with an empty sack. Both wore upon their heads white linen kerchiefs and bast shoes upon their feet. The shopkeepers, however, did not stir from their places. They did not pull the prospective customers from one another, did not contend for them, but were content to call to them from where they sat, so softly and abjectly, as was possible only on the eve of New Year's and the Day of Atonement. And when the peasant woman and the Gentile maiden walked into Mottel's, the men and women shopkeepers said to one another:

“Well, he's a Jew as well as we. . . . May God send all Jews a happy New Year. . . .”

And Mirke, the serpent's tongue, added with an upright, pious mien:

"Amen, Lord of the Universe, amen! . . ."

And thus in this season, until the Day of Atonement had passed, did these Jews and their wives and children strive to be better and more pious, even as their forebears decades upon decades ago; they cleansed and scoured their souls of sin, just as they did their houses and their cooking utensils for Passover, and the strange mood of the approaching Solemn Days, so mysterious and awe-inspiring, so majestic and pregnant with God's presence, grew more powerful daily, in and about them. . . .

Old Mayshe leaves the old House of Study and fares forth into the dark night, holding close to his face his lighted lanterns, which illumine his flowing white beard, and seeks the road to the Jewish dwellings. A melancholy rustling of the trees wafts from the forest through the darkness; the beadle stops before a house, raps at the shutters and cries out, in a voice that seems to come from the other world: "Get up for prayers! Get up for prayers!" From this house he proceeds to another, to a third, raps and summons the dwellers to God with his curdling voice that rings through the gloomy night. . . . Gleams of light appear in the dark windows, and from the houses comes the shuffle of bare feet, accompanied by coughing. Somewhat later, when the beadle's voice is

heard echoing from the next street, whence comes also the sullen barking of the dogs in the Gentile's yard, dark forms step forth from the Jewish homes, tall ones and short, carrying lanterns; coughing and sighing, they totter along sleepily, all in the same direction, to the synagogue, which by now stands brightly illuminated, with a sort of holy light, against the surrounding darkness. . . And now the dark night resounds with the united cry of Jewish fathers and sons, which rises from the assembly house with sighs and groans. . . .

Until the eve of the Day of Atonement the village Jews entreated God to forgive them their transgressions. On the morning of that eve, assembled in the synagogue, they begged forgiveness of each other. For these Jews felt that they had sinned against one another,—that they had torn the bread and butter from each other's mouths, quarreled over a customer, cursed, envied. . . . So they foregathered in the House of Study, treated one another to brandy and cakes, asked one another's forgiveness with earnest, solemn mien and wished everybody a happy year. ✎

There on the market-place the sinner Mirke flitted from shop to shop, her lean, lank body bent beneath her shawl, her yellowish countenance screwed into a grimace, her eyes red with weeping, halting before every vendor and huckstress, beating her heart and

sobbing: "I have sinned against you. . . . I am a wicked woman. . . . Forgive me, my dear man. . . . Forgive me, my darling! . . ."

And the man addressed would reply with an earnest, solemn mien:

"Forgive me, too, Mirke! . . ."

The women would answer, echoing her own sobs:

"Mirke, darling, forgive me, too! . . . May God forgive all of us and may He inscribe and seal a good year for all of us! . . ."

At night, after the fast had been begun, all the Jewish houses would be ablaze with light. Candlesticks with stearine and wax candles shone upon the commodes and the tables and cast a strange, mysterious glow through the room. . . . The fathers put on their white surplices with mute, solemn faces. The mothers, in white head-coverings and spotless garments, swallowed their tears, overpowered by the mood of the fast day. In almost every Jewish home fathers blessed their children, and grandfathers their grandchildren, before they left for the synagogue. . . .

✓ At Mirke's, in her old home, at the low window above the green mound, her aged father Avrom-Layzer the capmaker, who lived with her, sat at the head of the table,—a tall, spare Jew with a long, white beard and a parchment-colored face wearing an expression of deep absorption in thought. He sat in a white sur-

plice like a corpse from the other world, his eyes shut, his bloodless hands sticking out of the ample white sleeves, and was blessing his grandchildren, who stood ranged in the center of the room,—four boys and three girls.

Near the table, on which were lighted candles, stood Mirke in a white kerchief and a white kaftan, watching her father pronouncing his benediction upon her children, and a tear glittered upon the tip of her nose; her husband, Mayshe-Itsye, the Hebrew-teacher, a short, lean fellow with a sparse red beard and red eyebrows, wearing an alpaca coat, stood in the center of the room, his head bowed, his hands clasped behind his black girdle, swaying to and fro.

As Mirke's oldest daughter,—Layke, a freckled girl with red hair and reddish eyes,—inclined her head under her grandfather's white hands, Mirke concealed her face behind a corner of her white kaftan, stifling her tears and entreating with all her heart:

“Send her a sweetheart, dear God, for she's already a grown-up girl! . . .”

And her husband, Mayshe-Itsye, raised his head, glanced at his daughter's red head, upon which rested the trembling hands of the old man, protruding from their ample white sleeves, shut his eyes and began to sway more fervently than ever. . . . And while Chayim-Beer, his son, who was to be summoned for the military examination that year,—a lanky chap,

like his mother, with black down fringing his cheeks, cotton-wadding stuffed into his ears and a head of curly black hair,—inclined his head, the grandfather heaved a deep sigh, and in his mumbled benediction stifled tears were divined; Mirke broke down completely and burst into lamentation, which she soon mastered, however. After this wailing, other outbursts, long concealed, rose from her soul.

“O Father in Heaven, have pity upon him! . . .”

And Mayshe-Itsye began to pull at his nose and sob and sway piously. . . .

Thus, one after the other all the grandchildren approached their grandfather,—including Shlayme the wild creature,—and each bowed before him with an earnest, absorbed mien, a quivering spirit and bated breath. A solemn silence reigned throughout the household, over which a certain holy awe seemed to hover, and through this silence sounded the murmuring of the aged man, blessing his grandchildren from the depths of his heart. . . .

The flames of the candles upon the table burned in a different fashion, it seemed, impregnated with the awe of the Day of Atonement.

Somewhat later, they have all repaired to the synagogues. The streets are deserted; not even a child is to be seen. The entire village, together with the forest on the hillside and the dark sky overhead, seems steeped in the mystery of Yom Kippur.¹

¹ Hebrew, “Day of Atonement.”

VI

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

THE synagogue is warm and stifling. Hundreds of wax tapers burn upon the tables in earthen pots, and from them in every direction dart long, narrow, flickering, burning tongues, filling the atmosphere with a warm, sweetish odor of wax and a choking smell of sizzling tallow.

Tens of hanging candelabra and lamps pour their lights upon the people in their white surplices, swaying, groaning and wailing, drowning out with their cries the lamentations that come from the women's section. . . .¹

Before the altar stands Mottel, son of Channe-Dvayre; not Mottel the poor vendor of the rest of the year, who wages battle upon the market-place, contending for the chance to make a kopek profit, but another Mottel entirely,—the spokesman who weeps out before God the sins of all Israel. It is Mottel's opulent soul, which has left his lowly, money-grubbing body, that stands now before the altar. In his white surplice, his head cowed beneath his prayer-shawl, and thrown back, his exalted face and distended eyes turned heavenward, both hands extended

¹ Women sit apart from the men in all orthodox Hebrew services.

to the candles that burn behind the altar, he entreats, implores, and weeps with such feeling, such earnestness:

“O Lord, forgive Thou the sins of Thy people, for great is Thy mercy. . . .”

And in response comes a louder groaning, a louder lamentation,—a pounding upon the walls, upon the reading-desks, a beating of fists against breasts, a slapping of hands, and wailing from the women’s section, accompanied by the piping voices of the youngsters, who stand beside their fathers and their grandfathers, gaze into the prayer-books and feel the very presence of God and the angels, who look down upon them from the vast heights. And all this tumult breaks through the walls of the synagogue, into the mysterious darkness of outdoors and is wafted straight to heaven. . . .

Here stands an aged Jew with a flourishing white beard, both hands pressed against the wall, eyes closed, shaking his hoary head under his prayer-shawl and crying in a broken, plaintive voice; there near the wall sways a tall form, back and forth, to and fro, sobbing. And all at once he thumps his hands together and cries out impulsively, “Good God!” as if he has suddenly recalled a frightful transgression. . . .

“Father in heaven, woe is me! Heavenly Father! Woe! Woe!” cries Mottel’s tearful tenor. . . .

“Aye, aye, aye, ah, ah!” wails Mayshe-Itsye from a corner, in his squeaking voice, and his cry is taken up by all, both around him and in the women’s section, with a concert of sighs, sobs and lamentations.

Near the entrance stands the village apothecary, a blond young man wearing spectacles, pulling with his thin, white fingers at the blond beard on his under lip; he is holding a small devotionalary, glancing over its pages and moving his mustache slowly as he mumbles the prayers; beside him is the village teacher, a lanky fellow with sprouts of black hair here and there on his cheeks and on his chin, wearing a soiled collar. One finger he holds in his nose, twirling it absent-mindedly, and reads softly and calmly from his prayer-book. From time to time he begins to sway, whereupon he removes his finger from his nose and recites his prayers with fervor. Suddenly, however, he catches himself, ceases his swaying, sticks his finger back into his nose and resumes his low-voiced recitation. He is bashful in the presence of the apothecary, from whom he borrows books and periodicals, and does not pray with the ardor that he really feels. He desires the druggist to hold him for an “enlightened” person, wherefore he recites his prayers unobtrusively, and, as has always been his habit when he speaks or reads at ease, he picks at his nose. . . .

But a few moments later, affected by the prevailing

mood, he edges away from the druggist, gets into a corner, once more removes his fingers from his nostrils, starts swaying fervently, and his groaning voice merges with the din from the rest and flies with them to heaven. . . .

On Yom Kippur eve the village is submerged in silence. Through the darkness wafts the sinister whispering of the forest, and with what awe it whispers!

From the beds in the Jewish homes rises a sighing. The candles flicker and go out. And a mother gazes at the guttering candle with terror in her heart. "It has gone out. Woe! Has some soul, God forbid, been extinguished? . . ."

And on the next day the village is as quiet as a graveyard. All except the maidens and the very young children, who remain at home, are in the synagogue. The girls, too, are fasting; pale and earnest are their faces, and their hearts, too, are turned to God. . . . Not a living creature is seen upon the market-place. The Gentile peasants, too, know that the awful fast day of the Jews has come, and they do not journey to the village. Only "Jewish" goats wander hungrily about the shops, for they, too, have this day been denied food and drink; there are also the "Gentile" geese and ducks squatting upon their downy bellies, some of them pecking under their

wings; hens and their tiny broods are scratching about in the little heaps of dirt. . . .

Within the synagogues, sighs, sobs, cries unto heaven. . . . On the tables the tall wax candles have been burning since yestereve in their earthen vessels. The Jews in their surplices press their burning foreheads against the cool walls, beat their breasts and sob in silence. Others are striking their book-rests, clapping their palms, swaying fervently and howling, already hoarse. They fall upon their knees, press their foreheads against the floor and entreat, entreat. . . . From the women's section comes a wailing. . . . They are seized with the old universal chant of the cantor, and they sway harder than ever, accompanying him with rending tones:

“Ay, ay, ay! . . .”

They are already reciting Neilah. . . .¹ Soon the gates of prayer in heaven will be closed, and the members of the assembly, who since yestereve have had nothing in their mouths and feel very weak, gather strength for a final effort, so that they may let themselves be heard while the gates of heaven are still open. . . .

Mottel stands before the altar and his feet are sagging beneath him from faintness. He is hoarse, but there are still a few tears left in his eyes and some

¹ Literally, Closing of the heavens.

Jewish groans in his bosom, and his hoarse voice reverberates with tears and groans. Shmerel the cobbler, a broad, short fellow with a grayish-black sparse beard and tearful red eyes, who knows all his "tunes" and possesses a pleasant baritone voice, now edges up closer to the altar, on the other side of the platform, where his regular "pew" is, and begins to help Mottel out. His baritone rings through the hall like a bell, and Mottel himself becomes more spirited, and his voice, it seems, becomes clearer; the entire assembly groans. . . .

After the Eighteen Benedictions of Neilah a fresh breeze seems suddenly to waft through the synagogue,—soon Yom Kippur will be over. . . . Many countenances beam with a happy expression. The youngsters grow mischievous; like the sun from behind a dark cloud, the gladsome Rejoicing of the Law beckons to them with its banners, its Scrolls and its dancing. The village teacher is already at the druggist's side and is discussing with him Turgienev's novel, "Fathers and Children," which he borrowed several days before.

Once Neilah is over, the majority of the worshippers feel as if they have been acquitted of a very serious charge before a stern judge. Their hearts become so strangely light. The disburdened soul returns to its body, which is still free of weekday cares. The weeping has ceased. All eyes are aflame, all

cheeks are pale, and all legs are weary from hunger, from such endless praying, yet a joyous expression lights up all the blanched countenances. Shmerel the cobbler, who is fond of a glass, is already dreaming of the little flask that he prepared before the Day of Atonement for the breaking of his fast. . . .

Evening prayers are attacked hastily, and by the time the throngs begin to issue from the synagogues with sleepy gait, their surplices rolled up under their arms, the women and children with the devotionaries tucked aside, the twilight atmosphere is no longer impregnated with solemnity and awe; around the houses stand groups of maidens and little children with merry faces, waiting for their parents.

And later, when from the market, where they are opening the shops, comes the rattle of the keys, it does not sound so sorrowful and ordinary as on a usual Sabbath evening. . . . In many yards they are harnessing horses: the peasants who have come to the village on Yom Kippur are now preparing to return home with their wives and children, and some of the Jewish merchants are getting ready to drive into the surrounding towns with their merchandise.

In his home, on a low bench, sat Shmerel the cobbler, who had emptied half of his flask; on a form he was holding a shoe, which he was sewing for Berel-Itsye the money-lender. He hammered away and

sang a merry ditty. His sweet baritone rose from the semi-gloom of the room, which was lighted by a smoky lamp, and winged into the street, resounded over the village roofs and was lost in the darkness amid the little lights of the shops on the market and the dusky rustling of the forest.

“Ay-ay-ti-ra, ay-ay-ay! Ay-ti-ri-ra-ay-ay-ay!” resounded his merry song through the village darkness. “Ay-ti-ri-ra, pum-pum-pum! . . .”

VII

THE VILLAGE CHILDREN AT LIBERTY

THE following day the village teemed with life. The youngsters, free from cheder until the commencement of the next term, were in clover. Shlayme, Mirke's "wild creature," led a gang of urchins to a fence, over which hung branches bearing the last ripe apples of the season. With his new pair of shoes he placed himself upon a fellow's shoulders, reaching for the fence; when he had seized the uppermost board there suddenly appeared on the other side a huge, red hand which clutched his own. Shlayme set up a howl and began to kick about desperately; his companions, however, vanished on the instant, leaving little Shlayme hanging from the fence. He cried "Oh, mama!" and attempted to release himself from the big red hand, and soon from the other side appeared the angry, bushy-haired face and the broad shoulders of a Gentile; he seized Shlayme's new hat off the youngster's head, pulled his ears in excellent fashion and thrust him rudely down from the fence. The child fell on his knees into the sand, scrambled to his feet, placed both his hands upon his

bare head and started off on a run, crying, "Oh, mama! My new hat! Oh, mama! My new hat!" He ran past his chums, who called to him, but he did not stop, continuing to run with his hands on his bare head, wailing from the depths of his soul: "My new hat, mama! . . ."

Two peasant carts were riding by with a group of urchins hanging on behind; all at once one of them received a blow of the whip from the driver, whereupon the rest scampered off. Here and there children were playing "knots." Elsewhere gamins were quarreling, performing antics and turning everything topsy-turvy. The goats could enjoy no rest, and concealed themselves from the mischief-makers in the yards. The geese waddled hastily through the street with a loud cackling. The hens and their chicks sought refuge in the houses, in the spaces under the oven. The dogs came tearing out of the yards with an angry barking. . . . Until the time came around for setting up the booths. Then the youngsters aided their fathers and their elder brothers to erect the commemorative tabernacles. Planks were torn from the fences; they were sunk into the earth; boards were dragged hither and thither, and there was a din of clapping and hammering. What a gay time for the children! The youngsters' cheeks flamed, their eyes glowed, and their hearts beat in such a holiday mood, as they labored away at the construction of the arbor.

Amid the darkness of the night stalk shadowy forms with the undulating lights of lanterns in the direction of a house with illuminated windows, standing in the center of the market-place. Within, around a table upon which a samovar is chirping, sits Berel-Itsye the money-lender,—a tall Jew with a florid neck and a flowing beard, wearing an alpaca coat. A man enters with a lantern, and a bundle under his arm; he comes in softly, meekly, and as if in embarrassment, places the lantern upon the floor, hands the bundle to Berel-Itsye and heaves a sigh. Berel-Itsye undoes the parcel, glances at its contents—locks it in his bureau and gives the visitor a couple of rubles.

“May we all have a happy holiday,” prays the recipient, sighs again, takes his lantern up and walks out.

Scarcely has he disappeared when there enters a woman with a kerchief over her head and a lantern across her arm. She leaves the lantern behind the door, near the threshold, approaches the table at which Berel-Itsye is seated, shakes her head, removes a piece of cloth from under her kerchief, extracts from the cloth a pair of old-fashioned ear-rings and hands them over with a sigh. She receives two rubles, and says:

“Well, thanks be to the All-Highest. He does not forsake us. Now what could I have done for example if there weren’t any ear-rings, God forbid?

May He protect us all, it's good that I'm not spending the money on illness, ha? A good God, He does not forsake us! Now we can celebrate the holiday in fitting fashion! . . . A happy holiday to you and to us all, Reb Berel-Itsye. . . ."

She seizes her lantern and hastens away.

However poor the Jew of B—— may have been, a holiday was to him a holiday. . . .

After the first days of the Feast of Tabernacles it began to rain hard. The forest groaned, the green life within it began to languish. The sullen cawing of the crows was heard more frequently; in the orchards the last apples fell from the trees upon the moist, withering grass, and the streets were gradually transformed into pools of mire. . . . And if the puddle before a house grew very large, they would place a plank over it and stride across, some of the girls in their fathers' shoes, with their skirts raised high, huckstresses in winter kaftans, vendors in their thick overcoats. The youngsters, however, were little daunted by the rain, indeed! They were having the time of their lives; there was no cheder for them, and the merry Rejoicing of the Law was soon due.— This, then, was the life for them! They jumped about in the puddles, and as the water flowed noisily along the gutters, they launched boats and ships and chased after them through the mire, as wet as hens, drenched from head to foot; and if any of them hap-

pened to cough, much he worried about it! . . . A peasant's cart passed by, and on it sat a peasant with a wet sack over his head, huddled under the rain. The small, lean nag, soaked and with lowered head, trotted splish-splash over the muddy road. The cart shook and the mud splattered its wheels with a hissing noise. On a mound beneath the low window of an old shanty lay a white goat coiled up, his beard buried in his drenched back, looking sadly with half-open eyes at the rain. Near the door, deep in the mire, squatted a pig, grunting. And there scampered a wet black cat, miauing loudly, finally stopping before a house; she glanced at the gate with a more plaintive miau than ever, and ran on. It seemed as if she were seeking something; perhaps they had stolen her kittens from her that day and she was now dashing hither and thither through the rain in search of them, with her pitiful wailing. . . . From the market-place a yellow cur came running, his head lowered dispiritedly; for a moment he paused before a house and garden, stretched his yellow-haired hide and shook the rain out. Then he disappeared behind the garden.

Only the youngsters were merry and lively under this dreary autumn downpour, beneath that mournful sky,—the youngsters, in whose souls already danced the Rejoicing of the Law. . . .

VIII

CUTTING OSIERS

EARLY in the morning a veritable horde of youngsters with knives in their pockets leaves the village in the direction of the small forest that is situated behind the stream near the Jewish cemetery, bent upon cutting a supply of osiers. The air is heavy with darkness. The merry voices of the children ring to the accompaniment of the noise of their feet shuffling through the puddles. Shlayme, "the wild creature," walks at the head with a lantern in his hand. He is their leader, and therefore carries the lantern, which he took away from a little chap named Samke. The children speak all at once, trying to outcry one another.

"If the Gentile kids attack us, we'll make a stand. . . ."

". . . And give them a drubbing. . . ."

"A year ago Mitka's boy tore the hat off my head!"

"But, fellows, suppose Murza attacks us?"

"Then we'll recite the passage. . . ."

"And shower him with stones," cries the wild creature. "And chop his legs off for him."

"I'm afraid; he's such an angry dog. . . ."

"You needn't be afraid. You just wait an' see what I'll do! I'm not afraid of any dog!" boasts the wild creature.

They have already come to the outskirts of the village, where the Gentiles live. The dwellers are already up and little fires peer out of the windows into the darkness.

Suddenly a dog dashes out of a yard from the darkness, with an angry barking. . . . The "wild creature" cries out "Mama!" and remains fixed to the spot in terror, with the flickering lantern thrust toward the dog, which in turn thrusts its great white head and glowing eyes out of the darkness, gives a loud bark, disappears once more into the gloom and again protrudes its head. The entire group of children stand as if rooted to the ground; they are afraid to move from the spot, either forward or backward, and peer thither where the white head and the glowing eyes of the dog loom out of the obscurity, barking angrily, vanishing anew as if into a black sea. Suddenly one of the children begins to murmur the passage:

I am Jacob,
Thou art Esau;
And if thou bite me,
Demons will smite thee.

And all the rest chime in. Evidently the dog is intimidated by the strange chorus of murmuring amid

the gloom, for he gives a final howl and vanishes. Not until then does the little horde continue on its way, first quietly, then resuming its din and laughter. Each one now seeks to win the credit for having first begun the verse and all join in laughter at the wild creature's expense, because of his ready fright. That worthy feels ashamed; he is not at all pleased to have fallen in the esteem of his chums, so he makes reply:

"It didn't look to me like a dog, but something,—you know. . . ."

And seeing that this is of no avail, he seeks to redeem himself with a tale that he heard yesterday from his mother.

"Hush, children," he begins. "Did you ever hear tell of Rothschild's pig?"

"Rothschild's pig? Does *he* eat pork?"

"Rothschild is a Jew. He doesn't eat pork!"

"Of course he doesn't eat pork," cries Shlayme. "But he has a daughter with a face like a pig's, snout and all, and she grunts: 'Khrook-khrook! Khrook-khrook! . . .'"

"Really?"

"May I live so. My mother told it to me herself," shouts Shlayme. "His wife looked too long at a pig and she gave birth to a daughter who's half human and half pig,—a real pig! . . ."

"Ooh, ooh! Ay, ay! A pig? A real pig? You don't say? Well? . . ."

"Well? He's got mil-mil-mil-millions," recounts Shlayme, "and he sent out matchmakers all over the world, to look for a husband for her, because nobody will have her as his bride. He gives mil-mil-millions as a dowry, and nobody will have her. . . ."

"Ay, ay, ay! . . ."

"My mother says that my brother Aaron ought to take her as his wife and keep her face covered; and my father, too, asks Aaron to marry her. But I'm against it. I'll have to hide for shame. Khrook! Khrook! And if she should get angry and wish to scold my brother or me she'd start in like this: 'Cholera seize your bones—khrook-khrook! Khrook-khrook! Khrook-khrook!'"

"Khrook-khrook! Khrook-khrook! Khrook!" chorus the gang amid a tumult of merry shouts and cries.

The gloomy atmosphere turns grayish. Far in the distance, behind the stream, a rooster crows; soon another replies from a different direction, whereupon there follows a "cockadoodledoo" from every side, both from the village and from the distance beyond the forest and the river; there are long-drawn confident calls from old roosters, and short, piping, curt, timorous calls from the young cocks. . . .

Out of the grayness looms the Jewish graveyard with its trees and its tombstones facing the stream, which already glistens out of the milky atmosphere

with a silvery glint, and murmurs gently. . . . The children grow suddenly silent and glance about uneasily at the Jewish graveyard, and it seems to Shlayme that his two-year-old sister Ethel, who died two years before, is looking out at him. He turns his head away in terror and edges up closer to his chums.

And now they have reached the sparsely grown wood. Day begins to peer over the horizon; it glances out like a consumptive, and the red ribbon on the edge of the sky looks, too, like the hectic flush upon a consumptive's countenance. Shlayme extinguishes the lantern, then joins the others to apportion the knives with which they are to cut the osiers, which are still wet from the previous night's rain and the dew of early morning. On the withering branches of the trees glisten dewdrops, resembling a spider's web. Similar drops bejewel the wilting grass. There sits a gray bird upon a twig, shaking her winglets apparently in an effort to rid herself of the moisture, and chirps such a plaintive, yearning song. It is longing, perhaps, for the verdant summer, that now lies dying,—for the bright, warm sun, and—who knows?—for fledglings that the dark, sullen autumn has slain.

A black crow flies by with a raucous cawing, and, as if in triumph, its malevolent shriek echoes over the gaunt little wood, as though rejoicing at the death about it. . . .

The children have by now gathered bundles of osiers and are preparing to return home, when suddenly from among the trees appears their ancient enemy,—a peasant boy between thirteen and fourteen years of age, garbed in a coarse coat with a winter hat on his head. He cries out:

“Stepan! The Jewish kids are here!”

Then he begins to cry even louder, at the urchins:

“Dirty Jews! Dirty Jews! Dirty Jews!”

The youngsters have already taken to flight but the wild creature, who fears only a dog, cries out to them:

“Fellows, don’t run away! Let’s give him a good beating!”—He hands his lantern to Samke, entrusts his bundle of osiers to another comrade, takes off his hat and hides it in his bosom lest the Gentile boy steal it, and jumps upon the latter with his head bent down, like a wild young bull with his horns.

“Stepan,” cries the Gentile boy, at the same time rushing to attack Shlayme.

Shlayme assails his opponent’s abdomen with his head, at the same time pounding lustily away at his face with both hands, while the Gentile boy thumps him upon the back, in the ribs, and seizes him in an attempt to throw him to the ground. Whereupon Shlayme grabs the youngster’s nose, and the latter commences to kick Shlayme in the shins. In the meantime Stepan,—a smaller boy than his chum, but more agile,—has dashed upon the scene and before

the rest of the gang have rushed to Shlayme's assistance, Stepan has given him a bloody nose and has escaped through the trees with his brother.

Shlayme, his nose dripping blood, and his cheeks flaming, laughs in triumph:

"Maybe I didn't give him a beating!"

But when his companions tell him that his nose is bleeding, and he wipes it and beholds the sight of blood on his fingers, he bursts into howling:

"Oy, mama! Oy, ma-ama! . . ."

He begins to upbraid the children for not having helped him, and gives one of them such a hard slap that he, too, commences to yell:

"Oy, ma-ama! . . ."

Finally, however, he once more makes friends with the troop, now that the blood has ceased to flow from his nose. And he keeps repeating with bubbling delight:

"Didn't I give him the trouncing! . . ."

Later the parents of these children were striking the osiers upon the benches of the synagogue, and wild Shlayme struck another youngster in the face with one of them, whereupon the child's father boxed Shlayme's ears for him and Shlayme set up his cry anew: "Oy, ma-a-ma!" Might the Lord slay him before the next day, he vowed, if he didn't catch hold of that kid and tear the lungs and liver out of him.

IX

THE REJOICING OF THE LAW

THE village rings with song. The merry tenors interweave the strands of their melody through the darkness of night. The Rejoicing of the Law fills the hamlet with its spirit. In the synagogues Scroll processions are going on.

The old synagogue rocks with the singing voices. Children, flags, women, men—all in gay confusion. People stand upon the benches, on the tables, and run in and out among the men with the Scrolls. The women and maidens rush to kiss the Holy Scrolls, while the boys and the men join in a chorus and break into a merry dance. . . .

Mottel is drunk, rocks on his legs, waves his arms and laughs. Every other moment he bursts into a cry of "Holy Sheep," and the boys chime in with "Bah-bah!" And Mayshe-Itsye the teacher, his eyes flashing and his cheeks burning from the schnapps he has imbibed during the day, adds his voice to the youthful chorus, while the madcap Shlayme, with a fresh scratch on his face and a torn pennant in his hand, is already hoarse from shouting.

All at once Shmeril enters the hall, stops near the

door, throws his head back, brandishes his arms aloft to command attention and thunders in his baritone voice:

“Sha! Sha-sha-sha! I say: Hush-sh! Where is my chance to hold the Scrolls? A real one, you rascals!”

Mottel shuffles over to him, gesticulating.

“Shut up, you fresh old codger! . . .”

“Pooh pooh for you!” retorts Shmeril. “And pooh pooh for your father and your whole ancestry! You scabby-head, do you think that *you’re* a cantor? As much as my boot-leg! I’ve got a better voice than you myself!”

Mayshe-Itsye the teacher runs over.

“Reb Shmeril, for the Lord’s sake, are you at it already?”

Shmeril strikes his chest.

“Reb Mayshe-Itsye, I demand the genuine. All year long they feed me on filth, and give me the scantest honors, the rogues! . . . To-day I demand a gen-u-u-ine one. I’m as good a Jew as the others! I’ve got a soul, too! . . .”

“You’re a scandal-raiser!” shouts Mayshe-Itsye. “If you dare to call a chance to read from Torah filth, then you’re an enemy to Israel.”

“Who?” thunders Shmeril, spitting upon the palms of both his hands. “I’ll twist your leg for you in a jiffy! . . .”

And he really raises his fists against Mayshe-Itsye.

"Help, everybody! He's going to kill me!" cries Mayshe-Itsye, taking refuge behind a bystander. Mottel, however, has remained near Shmeril, who thumps his fist so hard upon that worthy's hat that Mottel shakes from head to foot; he begins to shriek in such terror that Shmeril advances toward the men with the Scroll, his hands opened menacingly.

"Tfrrr! No marching! No singing! No dancing, except with Shmeril! . . ."

Whereupon there springs up, as if from under the ground, Sholom the "Gentile," a broad-chested, gigantic fellow,—with a stubby, powerful neck and a face covered with fierce-looking hair and big bushy eyebrows,—he works for Chayim the commissioner on the wagon and takes the part of a Gentile in the Purim plays, whence his sobriquet. He, too, is drunk and has complaints regarding the apportionment of honors.

"R-r-right you are, Shmeril!" he manages to say; and what he cannot get through his mouth he expresses with his hands. "To-day is Simkhis Torah, isn't it? They feed me with the recitation of the curses, don't they? Then I'm entitled to a real scroll to-day, ain't I?"

"Of course!" corroborates Shmeril, thunderously. "Well, what are you standing there for? Back to the Holy Ark with the Scrolls! Get a move on, now!"

. . . They don't want to? Come on, friend Sholom, just roll up your sleeve! . . ."

And once again he expectorates upon his palms.

Confusion reigns. The Jews carrying the Holy Scroll dash toward the Holy Ark, and soon Shmeril helps himself to a Scroll.

"Let Reb Shmeril son of Abraham arise to the first procession," he sings out.

Then he gives a Scroll to Sholom the "Gentile" and both of them dance off with the sacred parchments, stamping so with their heels and shouting so loudly that the walls of the edifice tremble and the rest of the celebraters are infected by their rejoicing, even those who were angry with them; they place their hands upon one another's shoulders, the children and their flags mingling with the older people, and they turn about and dance beard to beard, shoulder to shoulder, and sing so loudly that the very air catches fire. . . .

Suddenly Shmeril seizes Mottel and imprints a kiss upon his shoulder.

"I know all your tricks," he asserts with enthusiasm. "And maybe you're not the sweetest-voiced cantor, so may I know good fortune, devil take your father! . . ."

Later, when Shmeril left the synagogue, it was already pitch dark and the rain was falling hard.

From the next street came the sound of song and dance. Shmeril took up the song and dance amid the rain and mire. One foot slipped deep into the mud and he hastened to pull it out, but his boot refused to move, as if some one were holding him there in the mud. . . . He pulled again and again, at length withdrawing it minus the boot and the rags with which it was wrapped about. So he let down his bare foot into the mud, administered a sound scolding to the recalcitrant boot, and as a group of singing Jews happened to pass by, he tore the boot up from the swampy soil, cast it over his shoulder and toddled off after the merrymakers, one foot bare, to sing and dance in the downpour in honor of the Rejoicing of the Law.

X

AUTUMN

ON the morrow after the Rejoicing of the Law, gone is song, gone is dance, gone is the festive spirit of the village. The sky is gray and spiritless. The street is submerged under puddles and mire. Just before dawn the rain has ceased to fall, but now it is again in the air, and before long it will be pouring anew. From the woods there comes the moaning of the autumn wind and the dying groans of the trees. On the market-place, under the eaves, which have been dripping rain since yesterday, sit the vendors near their tables laden with loaves of bread, doughnuts, dainties and kvass; they sit there huddled in large shawls, waiting and waiting to make a sale. The men and women vendors, garbed in winter jackets and overcoats, sit in the doors to their booths and look sorrowfully out upon the deserted square. Here comes a peasant in a winter coat and wet, muddy boots, with an empty sack in his hand. All of the hucksters dash forward to meet him, with the lanky Mirke in the lead; they fall upon him from all directions, and once more, as before the solemn holidays,

they tear him from one to the other, curse one another and fight for him,—even Mottel. . . . By this time he has laid aside his shawl. Now he is no longer afraid of catching a cold, and will not put on his shawl until the month of Ab.¹ Now he is no longer the fervent cantor, the spokesman with the deep soul, but the abject, poverty-stricken shopkeeper, the ambassador of his family's stomach, in plain words, and he calls the peasant to him with as much rivalry as the others. Only when Mirke scratches his hand, drawing blood, does he release the peasant, for the Jew of B—— fears the sight of blood. . . . He clutches his hand and presses it to his side with a wry face.

And a few moments later all is peace again. The shopkeepers sit in the doors of their stores and look sadly out upon the square. From Mottel's place comes the sound of his voice. He is telling somebody there the story of Rothschild's daughter, who is half human and half sow—(this particular bit of gossip was imported into the village by Chayim the commissioner from the city shortly before the Feast of the Tabernacles,—Succoth,—and it was the talk of the town).—Now Mottel is discussing it and at the same time explaining who Rothschild is, and how many kingdoms he has stored away.

The rain, which has been hovering in the air, begins

¹ July-August.

to descend. It whistles ominously in its course, slapping upon the eaves, upon the little roofs of the shops, upon the roofs of the dwellings. The puddles quiver and seethe beneath it. And when a cart rides through, the thick mud crunches beneath the wheels and squeaks with moisture. . . .

The Jewish goats take refuge in the entries. The hens scamper under the ovens,—only the old ones paddle about in the mire. . . .

The children have returned to the seclusion of the cheders, and their voices rise sadly and lazily into the rainy outdoors.

Suddenly the bell of the Polish church begins to toll. Somebody has died. Ding-dong-dong!—And the tones of the bell mingle with the rain, with the wailing of the forest, with the groaning of the trees, with the cares and the troubles in all hearts, and the village is so dreary, so dreary after the merry Rejoicing of the Law. . . .

Outside Chayim the commissioner's house stands his wagon, in which his "Bulanke" is harnessed. He is getting ready to drive to the city, about thirty versts¹ from the village, after supplies for the shops. Twice weekly he drives to the city with orders from the stores. On his wagon lie small hides, hog hair and a sack, which a certain village dealer is sending to the city. Chayim, a Jew past middle age,

¹ A verst is equivalent to .6629 of a mile.

with a white beard, in a wide overcoat, comes out of the house accompanied by three women, and they are soon followed by Shmeril the cobbler and Sholom the "Gentile."

The women's heads are covered with kerchiefs knotted behind. Two of them, elderly ladies, are shopkeepers, and are journeying to the city together with Chayim upon a personal quest for supplies; the third is Shmeril the cobbler's daughter, Shoshke, who is traveling thither to engage as a domestic. Only her large, black eyes are visible through the kerchief,—and her diminutive, turned-up nose.

Says Sholom the Gentile:

"Well, ladies, no delay. Into the wagon, now! With two birds like this it won't be a cold journey, ha, Shmeril?"

Shmeril is much affected, however, and when his daughter has taken her place in the wagon, he approaches her and says:

"Remember, now, Shoshke, what I told you. Take good care of your hide. In a big city there are a great many wicked creatures. You're only a young filly; so, if you should meet a fresh fellow, run away from him, give him a kick that'll send him to the deuce. A curse on his father!"

And suddenly he flew into a rage, as if he beheld before him that fresh fellow who had cast an eye upon his daughter. "Grab a stone and smash his

skull for him. . . . Do you hear what I'm telling you? See, Shoshke!" He beat his breast. "In case . . . God forbid . . . Oy! . . ." He pressed his lips tightly together, shook his head and pointed his fists at her. "It will be all up with me and you! I'll send you to your grave. . . . Remember, Shoshke!" With his bare, grimy hand he dried his eyes.—"Well, go in the best of health. Let's kiss again! . . ."

And he gave her a farewell kiss.

The wagon with its human burden gives a start and begins to creak and crunch through the mire under the rain. Shmeril remains rooted to the spot, gazing after it with sorrow-laden eyes and scratches his head. Suddenly he bursts out:

"Reb Chayim! Reb Chayim!"

The wagon comes to a halt. Shmeril runs after it.

"And your mother died the fifth of Tammuz,¹ so don't forget to burn a light upon the anniversary of her death. . . . Here!—" He took from a hide-purse another quarter of a ruble. "Maybe you'll need it! . . ."

The wagon makes a new start. For a few moments Shmeril stands motionless, gazing after it, then he goes back into the house opposite,—a tavern,—for a glass of brandy.

¹ The tenth month in the Hebrew calendar, corresponding to parts of June and July.

XI

WINTER

ALL night long fearful cries had been borne over the village from the direction of the forest. . . . A frightful struggle was waged there in the darkness. With a wild howl the autumn wind wrought destruction on every hand, tearing the leaves from the branches, shattering the nests of the birds, squeezing the last drop of sap out of the grass blades and annihilating the last vestige of green life. The trees could not withstand this attack of the angry wind; they bowed and groaned in despair. The half-dead leaves fell to the ground almost noiselessly, mingling with other leaves that had already died, which whirled about in the gloom hither and thither upon the dying grass with a dry rustle. All life lay writhing in fright and confusion. . . . Then the raging wind tore out of the woods and made an assault upon the village, uttering a soul-chilling howl. It knocked at the shutters, climbed to the roofs, crept into the chimneys and shrieked there with long, long, hair-raising yells. . . . And when the children in their beds heard these cries they were seized with terror. They suddenly recalled all the tales they had heard about spirits and

demons, reincarnations and goblins, and it seemed to them that these unworthy spirits were howling in the gloom. Somewhere a woman thought of a departed one whom she had known intimately, and from fright she began once more to whisper the prayer "Hear, O Israel," and pressed the child who was sleeping at her side close to her breast. . . .

And the next morning, when the village awoke, it was very cold in all the houses, and the roofs were covered with a layer of hoar-frost. The roofs had been torn off the tabernacles that had been left standing since the holidays. The mud on the streets had hardened into jagged ruts, and it was hard to walk, as the dirt was covered with a film of ice that looked like dust-laden glass. . . . And suddenly from somewhere or other came a flock of crows flying with their kra-kra, spreading over the roofs, the yards and the gardens, opening their wings, swaying their bellies, their heads, circling all around, and cawing in wild triumph over dying nature.

Smoke began to curl up from the chimneys. The shopkeepers left their houses, carrying brasiers.

The snow was falling. . . . Between heaven and earth a gigantic white veil lay hovering. Wherever the eye could reach, it encountered this tender, silent fluttering of the white veil. Below, a downy whiteness; above, a downy whiteness; on all sides, a downy whiteness. . . . The market-place and its booths re-

ceded behind this white veil and looked through it, as if through snow-covered windows.

The hill and the forest are visible only from the market-square. They hang there like a huge white cloud, upon which gray silhouettes have clambered. . . . The black Polish church peers through the white mesh and hides, peers through once more and then returns to concealment. It seems that all the dwellings as far as the Polish cemetery have somehow or other bent over and huddled together under the snow, and the spirals of smoke that rise from the snow-capped chimneys, huddle likewise together, weaving themselves into the downy web. . . . The Polish cemetery with its tombstones and monuments has almost entirely disappeared behind the white veil; only here and there stands out against the hill the silhouette of a snow-covered tree or a high, snow-mantled monument with its golden letters, as if some Polish nobleman with white hair and gold buttons has risen from his tomb and is gazing down upon the village which once resounded with his glory. . . . And there, beyond the cemetery, where the village boundary is, the heavens and the earth blend so closely that one can make out only a wall of whiteness. . . .

The village is hushed. There goes a shopkeeper on his way from the square. Like a gray shadow he moves through the white veil; around his neck is

rolled a large kerchief; he is bent over; both his hands are shoved into the sleeves of his overcoat; his footsteps are not heard on the soft, downy carpet. He disappears somewhere behind a gate. And from that house over there issues a Jewish shopwoman in a sooty cotton kaftan topped by a kerchief. With both hands she is carrying a brasier filled with glowing coals, just taken out of her oven, and is hurrying to her shop. Snowflakes fall into her brasier and the coals begin to hiss: Sh-sh-sh-sh!

Suddenly the silence is rent. A jangling of bells is heard. It is the police-sergeant on his sleigh, riding by as if on a soft carpet. . . . A few moments later come strains of song from a drunken Pole. A peasant emerges from a house, in a coat and bast shoes; he shakes his legs; his head and the warm winter cap upon it are lowered to his breast. He brandishes his arms about and sings in a melancholy tune:

Volga, dear river deep,
I'm coming to you;
Volga, dear river deep,
I'm coming to you!

The snow stopped falling during the day and by nightfall a frost had set in. The heavens were fiery red and yonder it was set as if in a wonderful mother-of-pearl. The houses with their snow-mantled roofs seemed flattened. From the chimneys the smoke rose

straight and pink, as if long, pink ribbons were winding their way upward. . . . The market-place and its booths seemed bathed in a red glow. The cross at the top of the Polish church glistened and the snow-covered hillock behind the woods sparkled, too, with all manner of gleams, as if bedecked with jewels.

There runs a Jew in a fur-coat, with the collar turned up, to the synagogue, to be in time for the evening prayers, and the snow sings under his step. . . . And yonder a crunching of snow is heard; peasants appear, with their small horses, dragging along sledges laden with wood, hay, and produce in sacks. The rivers have frozen over and given them a straight road. The hearts of the men and women shopkeepers grow lighter. Merry lights twinkle from the booths. A din arises from the square. . . . And now the moon has sailed into view. The village becomes bright and white. The hill behind the wood sparkles more than ever. The white roofs shimmer beneath the moon; the white street, too, glitters. . . .

The children come running out of cheder with hoods, with all manner of tatters wrapped about their ears, in kaftans and old, patched coats, in woolen boots, in their father's or their older brother's shoes, and begin to dance upon the snow wherever the drifts are deepest. Shlayme, the wild creature, who studies Hebrew with his father at home, where the cheder is situated, runs out, too, with his little gang of chums,

composed of youngsters who study under his father, numbering some ten in all. He runs out dressed just as he had been sitting in the room,—in his brother's kaftan and in his father's old boots; he squats upon the snow, stretches out upon his back, full length, and impresses his figure upon the ground. This is called "making a little man." The other urchins follow suit, and soon eleven "little men" lie upon the ground, one next to the other.

"Fellows!" cries Shlayme. "Let's make a granny!"

"A granny! A granny!" comes the noisy chorus.

And the eleven children attack the work with glowing enthusiasm. With their bare hands they gather snow and roll it into a ball. Their fingers get cold, and they have a stinging sensation under their nails, but much this concerns them! Soon a huge mass of snow has been piled up and Shlayme sets gleefully about making the granny. Now she is completed; a tall mound of snow with a head on top, which shines under the moon. The children commence to shout: "Eyes! Give 'er eyes!" Shlayme dashes into the house and soon returns with pieces of coal. He sticks two lumps in the side of the snowy head and one in the middle; now the granny has eyes and a mouth, too, and the gamins are content with their work. They join hands and commence to dance in a circle around her, raising a joyous tumult. In the midst of the

merriment it occurs to the wild creature that he will put a hat on grandma's head, whereupon he pulls the hat off one of the children who happens to be stronger than he. The child thus assaulted throws himself upon Shlayme and pushes him against the granny, into which his head sinks. And Shlayme begins to howl: "Ma-a-a-ma! Oy, Ma-a-ma!" The children vanish in all directions. Shlayme manages to extricate himself from the "granny," and as he rises, the snowwoman's head and eyes and mouth are scattered over his shoulders and his hat.

"Wait, wait! I'll shorten your years for you!"—he shouts whimperingly; then he feels a piece of snow under the collar of his kaftan and begins to wail anew: "Oy, Ma-a-ma-a!" and dashes into his house.

Life was easier for the village in winter. The peasants came oftener. Whence it happened that a Jew would taste a piece of meat during the middle of the week. And at Chanukah, when the festive candles burned in every Jewish home, and the grown-up boys and girls played "okke" at a kopek a game,—and the children played "goren," in many houses there arose the savory odor of pan-cakes and goose cracklings.

XII

A SAD SABBATH

THE village rested. It was a Saturday afternoon, a few weeks before The Feast of Esther (Purim). Nobody strolled along the streets, and even the goats remained in the entries. Outside the frost nipped everything. The sky flamed like the frozen cheeks of a healthy maiden. On the hardened snow played green gleams. The Sabbath villagers sat in their homes,—the fathers with their skull-caps on, the mothers with their Sabbath cloths over their heads, the daughters with their long tresses braided with ribbons, but not so neatly dressed nor with such shining countenances as on summer Saturdays. They missed the warmth of the sun, the verdure of the woods and the warm, meaningful glances of the young men. Folks drank tea from the earthen jug, looked into a holy book, recited psalms, read aloud from the "Great Light," and many a maiden, in company with a girl chum, read one of Shomer's or Blaustein's novels, a couple of which had blundered hither from the city and passed from one girl to the other until the leaves were tattered; and once in a while a young man would get hold of it, too. Almost every girl in the

village, indeed, had read these novels a couple of times and once it happened that a few pages from one of the romances went astray,—and from the most interesting part of the tale, at that, where the young man endowed with every virtue declares his love for the young woman endowed with every virtue,—whereupon Mirke's oldest daughter, Leah, red-headed Leah with the freckles, repeated word for word the missing pages of the novel, and one of her chums, who had a good handwriting and could even write a Russian address,—a maiden who was reckoned as most highly educated,—wrote it out and pasted it into the book.

On this particular Saturday afternoon Mirke's home was filled with sadness. A letter had come from their son Chayim-Beer, who had for several months been serving as a soldier in some Polish city. Shlayme-Itsye read the letter aloud with tears in his voice. At the table sat Mirke, wringing her hands, shaking her head, weeping and murmuring: "Oy, my son! Oy, crown of my head! Oy, my great affliction!" Old Avrom-Layzer sat there, his white head and his pointed skull-cap lowered upon his flowing white beard, listening to the letter and sobbing. Red-headed Leah, in a coat, sat with her jaws pressed against her hands, which were propped against the table. She looked into her father's face and her nose twitched. Shlayme, the wild creature, lay back-upward upon the warm oven-bench and likewise lis-

tened to the reading of Chayim-Beer's letter. Even the younger children, who were sitting upon the bench above the stove, maintained silence and earnest faces.

"It's very bad here in Pluzhbe," read Shlayme-Itsye. "Things have reached a climax. Especially for a Jewish soldier, who is not looked upon very kindly. Parents, have pity on me. Send me at least a couple of rubles per month. If not, things will be terrible."

Mirke's lamentations broke out, louder than ever.

"I'll pawn my very flesh and send it to him! Oy, my son! Oy, my heart! Crown of my head! My great affliction! . . ."

Shlayme-Itsye, too, burst into sobbing, and red-headed Leah wiped her eyes with her sleeve. But old Avrom-Layzer slowly raised his hoary head, murmuring as he swallowed his tears:

"Nu, nu, my children. It's Sabbath . . . Sabbath. . . . Don't disturb the holy day. . . . It is not allowed. . . . Oh, woe is me, woe is me. . . ."

He arose, took a psalm-book, sat down in a corner near a window and began to chant. Shlayme-Itsye put on his old cat's-fur coat, wound a warm scarf about his eyes and left for the synagogue. Mirke took the Yiddish Pentateuch, and began to read from it softly, while the tears rolled one after the other down her reddened nose. Then old Avrom-Layzer left for the synagogue, groaning feebly. Shlayme

jumped down from his perch, threw a kaftan over him, wrapped a red cloth around his ears and followed the elders to the house of prayer. Layke sat down upon the oven-bench, took down her youngest sister, six-year-old Channele, from the oven, sat the child down upon her lap and began to tell her a story in a distracted voice. The other children, too, listened to Leah's tale.

"Once upon a time, long ago, there was a princess, and she was as beautiful as all the seven suns, and as good and pious as queen Esther. And a prince fell in love with her, and he, too, was so handsome that nobody could look into his dazzling face. So once there came an ogre, with one eye in his forehead, and looked upon the princess, and he was smitten. And he cried out: 'Princess, princess, marry me!' She was frightened and hid in a high, high tower. But the ogre came and stole the princess away from the tower and took her off to his cave. . . ."

"If I could only get to my mother's grave I'd run over to it and pour my heart out," came the sudden interruption of Mirke's voice. Leah grew silent. But when the children urged her to continue the tale, she resumed the story in a very low voice and told them how the prince discovered the princess in the cave, how he married her. "And they lived happily ever after."

Later Mirke went to the synagogue. Three chums came to Leah, their heads covered with kerchiefs. They all sat down upon the warm oven-bench and one of them, Mottel's oldest daughter Chayke,—a buxom maiden with chubby cheeks and black eyes, and the same whom the Gentile from the grease factory had one Saturday, in the woods, pinched in the breast, saying to her, "What a pretty girl!"—began to talk about Rothschild's daughter, who was half human and half pig. . . .

"She'll get a sweetheart just the same. . . ."

"I wish I had her money, as surely as she will. . . ."

"With that pig-like snout of hers? . . ."

"Her father's millions will cover her snout."

"I should say so. . . ."

"I wish I had such a rich father. . . ."

"In that case, it wouldn't worry me a bit if I were as ugly as she," chimed Leah.

"With a pig's face? Are you crazy?" asked Chayke.

"And if you're so good-looking, what sort of sweetheart has your beauty brought you?" retorted Leah enviously. "How much of a dowry will your father give with you? What kind of sweethearts do you imagine we'll all catch?"

"What do you mean, 'what kind of sweethearts'?—Sweethearts. . . ."

"Where are they?" asked Leah, yearningly.
"Who even turns around to look at us?"

"Fie! Let but appear the destined one, and in a jiffy the trick is done. . . ."

Leah sighed. The other girls sighed, too.

Then they began to speak of a couple of novels by Shomer or Blaustein, which they had read several times. They discussed the heroes and the heroines, and every one of them placed herself in the position of the heroine, who was in love with the handsome hero, and they conversed dreamily . . . until Chayke began to sing in the same dreamy mood, at first softly, then in louder tones:

A good-for-nothing passes along the street,
Knows not a word of learning.
In idleness he spends his days,
Doing only what's forbidden.

The other girls joined in the chorus and the song echoed with longing.

Leah suddenly burst out:

"If only a good-for-nothing would come acourting us,—an ogre, a demon, a devil-may-care who! . . ."

And they all burst into laughter.

Somewhat later Mirke returned from her devotions. Leah's companions departed. Then Shlayme-Itsye and old Avrom-Layzer came back, closely followed by little Shlayme.

They all sat down to the closing meal. Mirke wept as she ate. "God knows what he's eating there now!" Shlayme-Itsye and the old man intoned the Sabbath songs, and stifled tears were audible in their voices. And now came the ding-dong from the Polish church,—ding-dong, ding-dong,—reverberating through the village. . . . And in this ringing all heard the clamor of their souls.

Little Shlayme recited his prayers hurriedly and again ran off to the synagogue. A wintry dusk hovered about the brass hanging-lamps there. Men sat in the corners chanting the Psalms; around the high tile-oven were grouped others: one with his coat-tails gathered before him and his paunch thrust forward, another rubbing his back against the oven. Mottel, too, was there, with his back to the warmth, with both tails of his coat held in his hands, telling a story, as was his wont. Shlayme was fond of listening to his tales, especially in winter, when it was too cold to play outdoors. So he, too, approached the oven.

"Now, when the wealthy Rappaport married off his daughter, he made her a wedding-gown of bank-notes, and after the ceremony he gave a banquet, and every poor man present went over to the bride and tore off a bank-note," Mottke was saying. Shlayme's eyes nearly popped out and his mouth opened wide in wonderment.

"I would have torn off a whole side!" cried Shmeril the cobbler.

"You're a coarse soul, anyway," retorted Mottel.

"Well," rejoined Shmeril. "Did they rip apart the whole gown? Down to the last bank-note? Was the bride left with only a shimmy on her back? What?"

"Are you crazy? You may be sure that under her gown she wore another."

"And maybe two," offered Shmeril. "She's got plenty, what? They've got enough. Oy, if I only had a real fortune,—I'd make my daughter a wedding-gown of ten-ruble notes, of twenty-fivers,—as true as I'm a Jew,—and distribute it among the poor! . . ."

"Yes,—a poor man is always charitable."

"Well, let me, for instance, wish to become a charity-giver. What can I give?" insisted Shmeril. "A plague! If only I had Rothschild's wife's ear-rings. They say they weigh a whole forty pounds."

Mottel started.

"Forty pounds? What are you talking about, you fool? They'd pull her ears off with their weight. . . ."

"Why ask such foolish questions, Mottel, when it concerns such a wealthy woman?" replied Shmeril, in deep earnest. "You may depend upon it that they

were made by a good workman. Maybe they're hollow." A din of laughter arose. Whereupon Shmeril spat out:

"What are you laughing at? Don't you believe me? I don't tell any lies, you rascals, a curse on your fathers! They have the gall to laugh at me! . . ."

He walked off in a huff.

Shlayme ran off to a circle of urchins who were squatting in a corner telling stories about lay saints,¹ demons, spirits and ogres, and brought the news that Rothschild's wife wore ear-rings that weighed a whole pood. . . .²

The synagogue grew dark. A man peered through a window. "The stars are out already!" Then came a slapping against the reading-desks. "Evening prayers! Evening prayers!"

"And He, the Merciful" . . . began the congregation.

¹ "Lamed-vovniks." So named from the Hebrew letters "lamed" [l] and "vov" [v], whose numerical equivalent, when they stand together, is thirty-six.

² Russian weight—40 pounds.

XIII

THE FEAST OF ESTHER

THE village was celebrating its Purim feast. The lights of the lamps in the Jewish homes danced merrily about. The tables were arrayed in fresh cloths and around them sat fathers, mothers and children, in holiday attire, sending festive gifts to friends and relatives and receiving gifts likewise,—oranges, sugar-cakes, a flask of raisin-wine and so on. And soon “Ahasuerus” entered in his golden crown, and “Haman,” who suffered retribution on the very spot; and when the Purim players left, there entered Sholom the Gentile, garbed in a peasant’s coat and bast shoes, with a harmonica in his hands, and gave a song and dance. Outdoors, spring was already in the air. The snow was melting, and the streets were filled with water. The sky looked warmer and more friendly, it seemed. From time to time came the merry twittering of a bird.

On that night Shlayme was the happiest child in the world. His father, the Hebrew teacher, sent holiday gifts to his patrons, and Shlayme delivered them. So he ran along through the melted snow clutching a

plate covered with a piece of cloth; the water splashed under his feet and his little soul, too, splashed within him for joy. He dashed into a brightly illuminated house where the family was gathered around the festive board. "My father sends you this gift!" And he removed the cloth from the plate, showed the orange and the couple of cakes, had a honey-cake thrown on to his plate, received two kopeks from the head of the house for his trouble, covered the plate again and—off he flew over the snow. . . .

Into one of the houses he was immediately followed by Sholom the Gentile with the harmonica, who stamped one of his bast shoes upon the floor, spread his legs wide apart, squatted down, and jumped up at once. Then he began to play upon the harmonica, to sing in Russian and twist about, marking time with his shoes.

Open the gate,
Poor granny is coming.
Without a shirt,
Without a waist,
And a wallet full of crumbs.

The town instructor happened to be present,—the tall fellow with the tufts of hair upon his cheeks and his jaws,—and he raised a shout:

"Good heavens! He's playing havoc with Russian grammar!"

Little Shlayme, however, was not of this opinion.

He forgot altogether on what mission he had been sent, and when he beheld Sholom dancing he chimed in:

Open the gate,
Poor granny is coming.

But when Sholom had received his pay and gone off, Shlayme came to himself. "My father sends you this gift," and he tore the cloth off the plate. On his final visit, however, he encountered bad luck. Having received two kopeks for his trouble and emerged upon the street in high feather, he was pursued by the recipient's little son, with whom he had fought a bloody battle the day before. The son attacked him, and Shlayme found himself in serious straits,—indeed, in a critical position. In the first place his hands were occupied with the plate wrapped in the cloth. That difficulty, however, might have been overcome. For Shlayme might have tripped his opponent with a well-placed kick. But how could he have the heart to do this to a chap whose father had just lavished two kopeks upon him? That would be the height of ingratitude. . . . So, when Shlayme felt the first blow, he commenced to exhort in the following manner: "I ask you as a friend, Bertchik. . . . I don't wish to fight with you. . . ." But Bertchik, a pale, lean youngster with black locks overflowing his temples, lowered his head, showed his teeth, glowered from distended eyes and edged up to him with his

thin hands outstretched, and spoke with anger through his clenched teeth:

“Why did you beat me up yesterday? Why did you beat me up yesterday?”

“I ask you as a friend, Bertchi . . .”

Before he could finish he received a resounding slap on the cheek that silenced him. The assailant took to his heels. Shlayme followed him with a glance of fury.

“Cholera enter his bones!” he muttered, as he solaced himself with the thought: “Wait! You just wait till to-morrow!”

He continued on his way with an angry countenance. Suddenly, however, he caught sight of Sholom the Gentile with an army of gamins tagging at his heels; he forgot Bertchik and the slap, ran home, left the plate of dainties there and was soon capering through the slush like a frisky young bull, running after Sholom with the other children, into the very houses, singing with him:

Open the gate,
Poor granny's coming. . . .

XIV

SPRING

WITH the approach of Passover the Jewish homes began to bustle with cleaning, washing, scrubbing and scouring. And the sky, too, overhead, cleansed and washed itself, as did the wood on the hill. . . . It was as if secret portals opened in the heavens, permitting issue to streams of warm, golden light, which drove the snow-white clouds across the azure vastness, like icebergs over the deep blue sea. It seemed that a mysterious flame under the earth melted the snow, sending it streaming across the village lanes. From the hill that was mantled by the forest, and the knoll on which the tombstones and monuments now stood spangled with gold dust, rivulets came rushing down, while sunbeams bathed within the flood. Now and then a solid mass of snow was loosened from the hillside, being dashed to bits at the bottom. . . . Here and there a bit of naked soil, dark and fat, peeped through the thawing snow, as if the earth desired to reveal a glimpse of its powerful body to the sun, so as to awaken its lust for creation even more strongly. . . . The trees on the hill emerged

from their snowy garb. They had not yet awaked completely from the deep, icy slumber; but they were arising, and stretching toward the sun. The secret of creation hovered over them,—the spirit of resurrection was in the air,—the soul of existence. . . .

From the landowner's yard just beyond the village a flock of doves arose. They circled above the wood and then cradled themselves in the air. One of them, with pinkish wings, performed some antics there. Now it flew with its head pointed earthward, its pink wings outspread, and now turned somersault, lifted itself higher still, rocked a moment in the air and then turned itself over several times in succession. Another dove, with a blue belly and white wings, tried to imitate the first, whirling about faster and faster; it seemed they were vying with each other to please their mates.

On the roofs of the houses, which were still moist from the snow that had been removed, and from whose eaves the water fell in a downpour, there was a merry dance of birds to the accompaniment of gay twittering. . . .

Large pools obstructed the streets. The marketplace was over-flooded. Before the houses were placed plank-bridges, over which women with their skirts raised high, men with gathered coat-tails, and maidens with their fathers' roomy boots made their uncertain way; but on everybody's countenance shone

springtide,—the warmth of Nature's holiday and of their own holiday, which was to arrive that day in the village.

Shlayme, like the other youngsters of the place, worked hard to-day from early morning. He ran to the bath with the Passover vessels to have them purified. Then he ground the matzo in a huge wooden mortar, helped carry the cleansed bedclothes out of the house and in again, fetched sand for the newly scrubbed floor, brought the stones with which the oven was to be scoured, and even helped burnish the candlesticks. To-day he was unusually good and obedient. Not a curse did he receive on this day, whether from his older sister Leah or even his mother Mirke, and his father Mayshe-Itsye the Hebrew teacher went so far as to give him an approving pinch, saying, "That's the way, my good little Shlayme. To-day you're the kind of fellow you should always be!" It was the sun that made Shlayme so good,—and even more than the sun it was the thought that to-night he would quaff wine and mead, eat Passover cracker-meal balls, and that to-morrow and for the whole week of Pesach he would play "nuts" with his companions. . . .

The roads were suited to neither sleighs nor carts. The freshets had sunk the small wooden bridges that lay across the ditches on the road to the village. The few peasants whose business took them thither waded

up to their waists in the flooded trenches, and from that position pulled along their horses and their sleighs. In the stream by the Jewish graveyard swam white ice floes. The water reached on one side of the hill where the shepherd in summer used to pasture his sheep, and on the other it made its way into the young forest, whence it poured over the road to the fence of the Jewish graveyard.

Over the flooded road, with a loud splashing and splatter, trudged Chayim the commissioner's "Bulaner" and his cart. Old Chayim and Sholom the Gentile, with their coat-tails high in the air, pushed in under their girdles, and their cotton pants drenched, walked at the side of the path over narrow strips of snow that were left here and there. When the cart approached that part of the stream where the road was entirely submerged, they began to circle about the Jewish cemetery, clutching at the fence as they did so. Suddenly a loud splash was heard, as if a heavy object had fallen. The wagon was deep in the water; its wheels were barely visible, and "Bulaner" was submerged up to his belly, casting his eyes in this direction and that with fright, neighing stertorously and heaving about between the shafts.

"Tfru!" exclaimed Sholom, reaching after the horse. And in a moment he, too, was up to his girdle in water.

Old Chayim was left standing at the fence, raised the peak above his eyes and gazed thus toward the sun, toward Sholom, and at his wagon in the water. Sholom was pulling at the reins and shouting, "Hooy, vloh, Bulaner! Vloh! Vloh!—May flames devour you!"

The horse pulled forward with all his might, but did not succeed in budging the vehicle; he began to snort and puff loudly, swaying his head this way and that.

Then old Chayim attacked the wagon, crawling into the water up to his waist and pushing the vehicle from the rear. Sholom shouted louder than ever at the animal, and all at once was seized with rage, bellowing at the horse: "Evil spirits seize your father and your grandfather and your whole line of ancestors!"—He tugged at the horse so strongly in his own direction that he almost pulled it out of the shafts.

And when the exhausted Bulaner proceeded toward the village with a heavy snorting, old Chayim and Sholom followed behind the wagon, their boots full of water and their clothes dripping from every spot.

Sholom burst into merry laughter.

"A fine ablution. Not so, Reb Chayim? And in Passover water, at that. . . ."

"I'll catch a catarrh from this, all right," replied old Chayim.

"What do you mean,—catarrh? Laugh it to scorn! You'll gulp down a good glass of Passover brandy, and it's good-by to catarrh. . . ."

And again he laughed merrily.

The spring sun and the mood of approaching Pesach induced this joviality, despite the fact that the water whistled in his boots and he was drenched to the marrow. . . .

Under old Chayim's hoary mustache, too, a smile began to form.

Soon they had reached the village, where, through the open windows of the Jewish homes, they recognized familiar faces of women and girls, wan with many labors, yet happy, for they were preparing to receive Passover. On the mounds beneath the windows goats were sunning themselves. From the houses came the din of pounding and clapping. Through the streets resounded the noise of frolicking youngsters. Over the pools and runnels played a warm light. Spring was in the air, sowing handfuls of life-seeds about, and wherever they fell, there life burgeoned and awoke.

Within the space of three weeks life had fully awakened, seething and burning on all sides. The village was already dry underfoot; on the sandy streets romped barefoot children with dirty little faces, and on the mounds sat their mothers. Many of them were mending shirts; a number were darning

socks on a glass, and one woman sat with a bunch of sorrel in her lap, sorting it and throwing it into an earthen bowl. Through the luminous, golden atmosphere wafted fragrant incense, as if invisible flowers were blooming there. . . . The wood, too, was in bloom, and the hillock under it. Everything, it seemed, was impregnated with gladness and the joy of life newborn. Hundreds of birds were twittering, and one might have imagined that every green twig, every little leaf, every blade of grass, filled brimful with the sap of life, was chirping its hymn of joy. . . .

The hens in the yards were clucking. The roosters wrangled with one another and jumped upon the hens' wings. Near a Gentile's house a gander was chasing a goose, and if any one dared approach his "lady," he would attack the intruder with strange savagery, thrusting out his long neck and menacing him with his sharp bill. A calf was running wildly around the town, kicking about with her hind legs. A hatless, barefoot Gentile gave hot pursuit, crying: "Tshokh! Tshokh! Tshokh! . . ." The village teacher,—the young man with the tufts of hair upon his cheeks and his jaws,—suddenly seemed to have been convinced that every maiden in the place was a ravishing beauty. And when Mayshe-Itsye's school-room passed by,—which is to say, the little students from Mirke's house,—he happened to notice red-headed, freckled Leah standing near the mound,

whereupon she, too, grew suddenly so beautiful that he felt a strange pang in his heart. She became aware that the "teacher" was staring at her, blushed, and drooped her eyelashes. Then she followed him with her glance and heaved a sigh of longing.

"Maybe . . ." she thought. "Maybe I'll find a sweetheart at this year's fair. . . ."

And the village shopkeepers on the market-place, as well as the other Jews of the vicinity, were thinking, too, of the annual fair, which would take place soon after Shabuoth (Pentecost). Now that Passover had gone by, they were all poorer than before. The holiday had consumed almost all their savings, and now all their hopes were centered upon the fair. . . .

The nights were white and warm. The soft light, it seemed, was luminous with desire. The moon looked yearningly down upon the forest, the fields and the valley; saw the stirrings of life, the blooming of the verdure. . . . Somewhere beyond the town a bull bellowed savagely, and close by, a nightingale trilled its passionate song. Leah lay upon her couch and thought again, with deep longing:

"Maybe at this year's fair. . . ."

XV

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FAIR

THE village prepares for the fair with all the avidity of a hungry man looking forward to a banquet. Young and old alike glow with expectation. A few days before the time for the fair has arrived, its spirit is felt throughout the population; the place teems with excitement. Every house is converted into a hostelry, every home is transformed into an inn. There is washing and scrubbing, tidying and sweeping, cooking,—as if in preparation for a wedding. . . . The housewives stand by the glowing oven with rolled-up cloths,—perspiring, toil-worn countenances, shoving in pots and taking them out. The daughters, with their sleeves rolled up as far as their shoulders and their hair disheveled, are busy scaling fish, peeling potatoes, kneading dough. Some of them have their faces or their foreheads adorned with fish scales. Others have flour all over their noses. The fathers with their coat-tails gathered out of the way, fetch water from the well or help their wives and daughters carry things about. There is not an idle hand in the house. Everybody is hard at

work, everybody is hurrying, preparing for the fair. . . . And if a tot happens to get in the way, its mother curses it, its father slaps it, its older sister thrusts it aside, whereupon it throws itself upon the floor, begins to yell and cry and stamp its little heels upon the ground. The cat scampers hither and thither in confusion, from the windows to its haunt under the table, thence behind the oven, then back to the window and out of it on to the turf. There she remains, coils her tail, turns her head back to the open window, rolls her yellow eyes, listens to the din from the kitchen and shakes her transparent ears, as if in amazement. . . . The goat stands on the threshold of the open door, stares through its silly eyes at the busy persons, and chews away. If some one happens to dart out of the house it catches a kick, withdraws from the door and ceases its chewing. Soon, however, it is back in its place in the open door and resumes its rumination, until it is struck by a rolling-pin or a broom, whereupon it retreats helter-skelter, lies down somewhere in the entry or runs out into the yard.

This is no time for disturbance by any one. Everybody is now seriously occupied, consumed by one thought, one hope; there is talk of nothing else,—indeed, there is little talk at all. If something should be required from outside, the one who needs it dashes out of the house with strange celerity. And should

one on such an errand meet an acquaintance, or even a friend, there is no time for stopping; there is only a weary nod, and one runs on, breathlessly, each to one's destination. Folks even sniff their tobacco in a different manner. Prayers, too, are recited hurriedly; as to meals, it is superfluous to speak of them. Food and sleep are the last thoughts that occur to the Jews of B—— at such a time. . . .

On the market-place stand Jews with axes, hammers and saws, chopping, hammering, sawing away, fixing stakes into the earth, surmounting them with canvas frames, making little stands, open chests, barrels, on which they lay out their wares. They work in haste, bending and squirming in every direction, squinting strangely, making queer grimaces and pant for breath. From the booths nearby comes a din of hammers and axes, too; the men and women are arranging the goods they have bought for the fair. . . . A dull confusion fills the atmosphere. . . . The heavy-paunched sparrows who have come to pick up a grain of corn or a wisp of straw hop hither and thither in fright; they fly about with a ceaseless chattering, pause upon the roofs of the stalls, on the fences,—first a solitary one, then a second, a third, and a fourth. . . . They turn their heads in every direction, flap their wings, hop about, flit from this spot to that, and stare. . . . If there be a hero among them, he spreads his wings and darts to the ground,

followed by the rest. . . . Hammer and axe begin to bang more loudly than ever; a splinter flies into the air; the crash of a broken plate in an open case is heard; whereupon they take to their wings again, with a frightened chatter. . . . The geese, the ducklings and the hens that usually run about the market-place, now too flee the spot, banished by the hammering, the tumult, and the unusual activity of the village folk. Even the Jewish goats are afraid to approach the precincts whence issues the wild commotion, where persons are dashing hither and thither, brandishing hammers and axes and sticks, which glisten in the sun. . . . The dogs in the yards hear the clangorous sounds and growl. If a dog should come forth from behind a gate he runs off in the direction of the market and begins to yelp, then raises his head to the sky and begins to howl; whereupon other canine voices join him in the chorus,—thin, coarse, hoarse canine voices. . . .

Nor are the children in the cheders at ease. Some of them, hearing the noises from the market-place, feel their hearts quiver with restlessness, and before their mind's eye rises the vision of the fair. . . . And even those whose ears do not catch the din from the square are likewise aware of what is going on now in the market-place and know that at their homes all is being prepared for the coming fair. They all sit there as if on burning coals, waiting impatiently

for the moment of release. They recite their Hebrew lessons so languidly, so unenthusiastically, that at any other time they would be rewarded with many a slap from the teacher. But on this day their instructor, too, is infected with the universal thoughts of the fair, and he himself would gladly have a look at how things are progressing on the square, and find out whether many new guests have arrived, and whether so-and-so and such-and-such has already come. . . . He, too, looks distraught, and his voice sounds languorous, preoccupied. And he wonders: whether the fathers of his pupils will have a profitable season at the fair, and just how much each of them owes him for tuition. . . .

The pious rabbi, Reb Avrom, who lives upon the market-place, is also enmeshed in sinful thoughts. He hears the din as he sits there and teaches his class. Through the open windows comes the joyous sound: "Buzz-buzz. . . . Bang, bang . . . buzz, buzz!—" And he recalls that at the previous fair certain Jews became involved in differences and appealed to him for judgment. . . . And he recollects the handsome sum he received from them. . . . And he thinks: "Perhaps this year God will have pity upon me and send me Jews with conflicts to settle." . . . But he catches himself. Good heavens! How can he desire controversies to arise between Jews? And he reproves himself with pain in his thoughts: "Ah, ah,

how sinful is man." . . . And he begins to recite in a louder voice, to drive all sinful thoughts away with the sound of his prayers. . . . But the din from the market-place comes in louder than ever through the window, as if to spite him. Whereupon the pious rabbi sinks again in thought, no longer hears his own voice, which continues to recite automatically, and thinks: "But if Jews *must* have controversies, it is better for them to let a rabbi settle the trouble." . . .

Berel-Itsye, too, the wealthy money-lender of the town, is now exceedingly busy. One after the other, —men and women, young and old,—come to him to lend money; this one asks a five-ruble note; the other, a ten, and occasionally some one goes as high as a whole twenty-fiver. Some bring him an article in pawn, others merely a note. And he haggles with each and every one, and scolds everybody; his applicants fawn upon him, give him their sacred oath, but at every loan he makes a sour grimace and heaves a deep sigh.

At the Jewish graveyard there are lively scenes. From the surrounding towns come women who have been born in the village of B——, and who left it shortly after their marriage. Some of them have a father or a mother reposing in the garden of the dead. On their arrival for the fair their first visit is made to the graveyard, and they are accompanied by a sister, an aunt, or a grown-up male child. . . .

The warden, dressed in his holiday array, receives them with a holiday smile and leads them to the graves amid the trees of the green, tranquil little world. There the women fall upon the graves with wails and lamentations, speak their hearts out, pray for their husbands, for their children, pray for good business, for prosperity. . . . The men who have accompanied the women hither, weep in their hearts, and recall how he who now lies under the mound looked in life, and the splendid virtues he possessed—for the vices have all been forgotten; they recall that at some time or other they, too, will repose underneath just such a mound, and their souls became so weak, and many of them forget about the meaning of the fair altogether. . . . Only the warden strolls among the graves with a tranquil mien and strokes his scraggly beard in meditation. The wailing that comes to his ears moves him as little as the tombstones amid which he saunters, and he is engrossed with the speculation as to how much this woman will give him, how much that one, and whether he will earn as much at this year's fair as at the one a year ago. The previous year he took in no less than two rubles from the women that visited the graveyard. . . . If he should get that amount this year, it would not be at all bad. . . .

Now another woman enters; he recognizes her and runs up to her with a holiday smile and with a friendly welcome and leads her directly to the graves. . . .

And the more women that come, the louder resounds the lamentation, and the greater satisfaction is visible upon the countenance of the warden as he scratches his scraggly beard.

And when a woman departs from the cemetery with tear-stained eyes, giving him a few kopeks, he wishes her a happy fair and hopes that he may see her again, a year later, in the best of health. . . . She thanks him and then dashes toward the village, to unpack the wares that she has brought to sell at the fair. . . .

Every moment brings a new visitor to town,—a man, a woman, aged folks and youngsters, all in Sabbath attire; and each if them is dragging something along,—each of them looks wearied with the labor, and each looks in the same direction,—toward the market-place, as if toward a battlefield. . . .

Suddenly a band of gipsies appears upon the market-place, as if it has sprouted from the earth. The men are dressed in wide, velvet trousers with red shirts; they are broad-shouldered sinewy fellows, without hats and with curly black hair, dark piercing eyes, swarthy faces, pitch-black beards and sound, glistening white teeth; the women are likewise swarthy, black-eyed, strong and muscular, their red kerchiefs knotted at the nape of their necks, wearing yellowish skirts, raised in a special manner at the front, and barefoot. They walk noisily along, with such a powerful step that the dust rises from their

feet. As they proceed on their way they brandish their arms, cast looks in every direction and talk in a loud voice in their own cant. The shopkeepers run out of their stalls and follow the band with their glances; the people around the canvas booths cease their clapping and their hammering for a moment and eye the gipsies; heads appear in the open windows of the houses; if a child catches sight of them from afar it distends its eyes in fright and darts back into its house; the dogs scent them and begin to bark; the moment a Gentile of the town beholds them he thinks of his horse. . . .

And somewhat later there begin to appear vans and vans,—one van after the other. . . . They arrive from the farther towns and villages, and come from every direction, over every road, in rapid succession. . . . There is a jangling of bells, a creaking of wheels, a clatter of hoofs, the snap of whips, and the buzzing of conversation amid huge pillars of dust. . . .

The vans drive into the same yards in which they put up the previous year; the same landlord and landlady, with the same cordial greeting, as a year ago, receive the same guests as on the year before, help them to carry their luggage in and serve them with the same obsequiousness as the past year.

And soon the same old samovar is chirping upon the table, and the same old questions are asked by

the good-humored guests: "How is everybody?" And the same answer as a year ago is given by the host and hostess: "Well, pretty good, thank God!" And the grown-up daughter hears the selfsame compliment: "May no evil eye gaze upon her, your girl is growing to be a perfect beauty!" And she responds with the selfsame bashful smile, and her cheeks blush the same fiery red. And among the guests there are always one or two who make a business of matchmaking, also, and very soon a conversation is started upon that topic.

And at evening, when the sun has already set, most of the village yards are already crowded with wagons, many of the houses with guests. Even at the money-lender's house there are a couple of guests, some of the wealthier dealers from a large city. Guests have even been lodged in the synagogues,—Jewish mendicants, who have come from a long distance on foot, to beg at the fair.

And still folks come riding in to town. . . . More vans, more carriages, more wagons, more riders, more bustle and dust. . . .

Among the recent arrivals, the most noticeable are the Jewish butchers, and the Jewish horse-dealers. Both have shaved necks and wear red girdles. Both are to be distinguished from the other Jews by their gait and their manner and the general expression of their features. The Jewish butchers possess a cer-

tain savagery, look through distended eyes, create a din wherever they go, speak with arrogance and are surrounded by an atmosphere of loud cries. They produce the impression of proclaiming: "Hide from me if you value your life!" There is more of the wild ox in them, it seems, than of the humble Jew. The Jewish horse-dealers are similarly distinguished from their more ordinary brethren by their manner of speech, their gait and their expression. They are more like gipsies, it appears, than Jews.

Night has fallen. A half moon peers down upon the forest and the village, and the din still sounds and cradles itself upon the bright white night. From all sides people come running,—children, men and women,—talking or shouting. On the market-place an unusually large number of lights gleams all about. Around the canvas booths are stirring a crowd of people with lanterns in their hands. . . .

Gradually the streets become less crowded; the dogs, too, disappear like shadows behind the gates of the houses. The din subsides. The lights on the market-place are one after the other extinguished. The hoarse rattle of keys is heard, and the closing of the shop doors. The men with the lanterns crawl under the vans. There they go to sleep beside their wares,—this is their abode for the night.

The guests sleep in the houses. Husband, wife and child have prepared places for them. The wife has

gone to rest upon a little bench, with some old garment of her husband's as a pillow. She sleeps in her clothes, with her shoes on. So, too, slumber her grown-up daughters upon another kitchen-bench. The younger children repose upon the floor, which has been sprinkled with yellow sand in honor of the guests. . . . The husband himself has laid down to doze close by the window, upon an improvised bed made of a few chairs; but he is not asleep; he is listening to the noises outside; perhaps some new guest is driving to his house. . . .

In his van on the market-place lies the teamster, snoring. Under the shelter stands the horse, chewing hay and snorting. From the entries comes the sound of the goats' regular breathing as they lie there asleep.

The village slumbers. The moon has risen higher above the woods and showers silvery dust upon the hamlet. Somewhere a nightingale is trilling. . . . And somewhat later the creaking of wheels is heard anew, and the ring of hoofs resounds throughout the sleeping community. Now guests are arriving. . . . Out of the houses come men, softly, on tip-toe, moving about like shadows, peering into the white night to see who is riding there. . . .

The following morning the commotion in the village becomes worse than ever. The din has arisen very early and is heard from every direction. The syna-

gogues are filled to overflowing. The beadles run about from one guest to another with merry faces and give everybody a hearty welcome. And to those of the newcomers from whom they expect a generous perquisite they offer a pinch of snuff from their snuff-boxes. Prayers are hastened; everybody is in a hurry; there is no time. In the yards of the synagogues are ranged the newly arrived mendicants, some with canvas wallets and with staffs,—men and women, well along in years and in some cases very aged,—holding their hands stretched forth to the passers-by, asking alms. The cheder children have been granted a holiday, so they help the teamsters of the vans, lead the horses to the wells, and scamper about among the vans, between the stalls, and with heated faces they hang on behind a wagon or a van and steal a ride. . . .

With every moment the racket grows louder and louder. . . . New vans keep arriving, new wagons, horse-dealers with a veritable herd of horses, cattle-dealers with whole droves of oxen, newcomers on foot. . . . They throng from all sides in flocks; from every direction comes a jangling of bells, a buzzing of voices; clouds of dust arise as they fill the yards, the houses, and inundate the village. The market-place is already black with people. The shops, the vans and the tables are not to be seen because of the swarming concourse of heads and shoulders that

sways hither and thither. The birds have taken refuge on the hill in the woods. The geese, the ducks and the hens have disappeared from the square. The goats are in the yards, tied to the fence. Only here and there a dog yelps in some enclosure. From the chimneys of the houses rises a dense smoke, as if it were mid-winter. Within, the ovens are going full blast; the women are cooking and baking for the guests. The heads of the homes and their children are perspiring with exertion. To-day they are working even harder than yesterday. From the open windows comes a din and a stifling odor into the street,—a smell compounded of fried fish, roast meat, tobacco, schnapps, beer, kvass and sweat. . . .

In one of the houses some gypsies are seated with Jewish horse-dealers, drinking and slapping each other over the hands. In another, some Jewish butchers are having an altercation, amid shouting and tumult; they curse one another, and are scarcely able to restrain themselves from coming to blows; their arms tug this way and that, like angry dogs at a chain. In a third house are some Jewish dealers in flax and produce, drinking tea, stroking their beards calmly, wiping off their perspiration with their colored handkerchiefs, with their sleeves, with their coat-tails, or with their bare five fingers, and discussing business. And yonder is a Jewish maiden, bent before an old gipsy woman who is examining the girl's

hand; the maiden's cheeks are fiery red and her bosom heaves with intense agitation, until she hears from the fortune-teller's lips just what sort of excellent sweetheart she is destined to find. . . . And elsewhere, at the height of the commotion, they have told the oldest daughter that she is to expect a visit from a prospective husband. Whereupon she grows confused and her arms seem to become paralyzed at their labors. Her father seizes the work from her and her mother begins to look about the house to find some secluded spot where the girl may change her clothes. The house is filled with people, so she sends the girl into her shop, where the Passover tableware is stored; there she may array herself in her best. So the daughter seizes her Sabbath finery out of the wardrobe and dashes into the little shop in a daze, and her mother's eyes follow her sorrowfully, and her mother-heart is on the point of breaking: "Dear God, let this be the poor girl's happy hour! . . . Send her a husband at last. . . ."

She would gladly go into the place and help her daughter bedeck herself, and make sure that she appears to best advantage by the time the prospective husband arrives. . . . But orders pour in from every direction: schnapps, beer, tea, food. . . . And her exhausted husband cries out: "What's she stopped over there for?" And her sweating children call: "Mama, come here! Mama, come here!" She

forgets everything and dashes madly to her husband, to her children, helps them serve the guests, seizes a firefork and goes to the oven, where something is burning, and in the meantime new guests arrive, and she and her husband run to greet them; she tries to smile to them in friendly welcome, but her smile is a weary one.

In another home one of the Jewish wives is scarcely able to stand on her feet; from under her white head-covering peeps a lock of hair that twists like a snake across her heated face; her waist is unpinned and her skirt, too, is half twisted, with the front part in back; but who has time now for attention to such details! Who in all the village now has time to feel tired? . . .

It grows rather late. The sun will soon set. In honor of the fair preparations are being made for service in the Polish church. The black doors are already open. Outside stands the priest, garbed in deep black, with his white head and youthful face, gazing with a tender smile upon the streams of people and wagons that flow through the village.

Now peasants begin to appear with their wives and grown-up children. They arrive from every direction upon their carts and on foot. Some of them wear gray woolen short and wide kaftans with red and blue girdles; others come in long linen shirts and linen trousers, with dusty shoes, or barefoot altogether. The women wear white kerchiefs upon their heads,

and white kaftans with ample, flowered sleeves and bosoms, and a few have skirts with flower designs. And all are bringing something to the fair. Here comes a peasant leading a cow by a rope, while his wife helps along at the rear, goading the animal with a rod; there rides another peasant, with a calf and a sheep tied in his cart. The sheep lies comfortably upon its belly, its head turned toward its back, and looks foolishly about. The calf, however, pulls at its fetters, tosses about hither and thither, tries to disentangle its legs from the rope, utters loud cries and foams at the mouth. . . . And yonder a cow has taken it into its head not to go another step, and the peasant tugs away at the rope with a shower of curses. This is of no avail, so his wife strikes it with the rod; the animal refuses to move, so the peasant seizes its tail and begins to twist it about unmercifully. Whereupon the beast dances off in haste. . . . Peasant women go by with fowl in their hands. Others carry baskets covered with hay, containing hanks of thread and yarn as well as pieces of linen. . . . Wagons filled with geese roll by, and others with ducks, hens and baskets. Others still, with flax. Peasants come by with sacks of flaxseed, corn and oats. The shopkeepers rush forward to meet them, crying, "Welcome! How do you do!" And they drag them on to the crowded yards and the overcrowded houses; they drag them and dispute for their patronage, seiz-

ing the customer by the shoulders, his horse by the halter, harness themselves to the wagon and pull it along, shouting and panting as they go. . . .

The village is wearied with hard labor. It rings with hundreds of different sounds. The very houses seem to shout through the open windows and doors with human voices. The yards clamor with a wild whinnying of horses and a mooing of cows. The market-place shrieks; the ground groans beneath the stamping of hundreds of feet and hoofs, and the crunching of wheels. Over the roofs there is a raucous din. High over the treetops of the forest upon the green hill there is a resounding tumult. The same tumult sounds over the other hill, high above the tombstones and the monuments of the Polish cemetery. Far over the black church edifice echoes the clamor. Far, far off under the beautiful blue heavens the commotion of the village seems to reverberate. . . .

The sun sinks to rest behind the forest. The western sky is illumined as if by a conflagration. The crests of the trees seem to have been inundated by a red wave of flame. The hill itself is covered with tints of red and gold. The white canvas vans on the market-place are bathed in a crimson glow, which engulfs the dense crowds of people, the horses and the wagons about the booths. The windows of the Polish church are aflame with a blood-red reflection. The

priest disappears behind the black doors. And now the piercing, metallic booming of the bell is heard: Ding, dong! It echoes over the village and is soon swallowed in the noise of the scene. . . .

The peasants remove their hats and make the sign of the cross. Their wives kneel, and cross themselves. Instinctively, the Jews shudder. . . .

Ding, dong! Ding, dong! Clang! Cling! Clinng!—And the booming of the bell mingles with the surrounding din. . . .

The sun has set. The flaming red wave is extinguished. The reddish gold reflections of the church windows have been, as it were, wiped off. The sky becomes more blue, then paler and paler; the atmosphere turns grayer, then darker. Dark shadows dart about the village, mingling with the tumult and the sounds of the church bell and gather before the approaching night. . . . On the square and in the windows of the houses, little lights appear. . . .

Later, the moon comes out, and once more the village is covered with silver dust. . . .

For a long time the noises continue to rise into the bright night. And at a very late hour, after the shops have been locked and the men with the lanterns have vanished under the wagons, the village has not yet gone to sleep entirely. To be sure, the shrieking din has subsided, yet the place is not by any means at rest. An uneasy activity is felt,—a slumbering

bustle, a somnambulous murmuring. . . . Hundreds of peasants have been forced to spend the night upon the streets, since there is not a place in yard or home into which they may be squeezed. So they have unharnessed their horses, dragged their vehicles to one side of the road, raised the shafts aloft and tied their horses thereto, and laid down to slumber upon their wagons, or on the grass nearby, near the doors of the shops on the market-place, on the mounds before the houses, in the yard of the church and at the foot of the hill on which the Polish cemetery is situated. . . .

There lies a peasant with his face toward the moon, a pipe in his mouth, telling the peasants grouped about him how a gipsy deceived him with a horse. He smokes as he tells the story, and spits up to the moon, and curses the gipsy. His listeners give vent to expressions of wonder and all are agreed that a gipsy is worse than the devil.

Farther on lies another old peasant recounting vehemently the suit that his town is waging against the landed proprietor on account of the woods. And the lawyer has already written documents to the governor and even more, but it's no use. If the proprietor catches one of the village men in his woods, he beats him black and blue and has him arrested, and takes away his horse or his cow. There's no justice except at St. Petersburg. And wise folks say

that if they were to send a lawyer to "Peter," justice would certainly be done.

"True! True! You must send to 'Peter'! To St. Petersburg," chime the peasants about him in unison.

A peasant woman is telling a woman beside her, in a mysterious tone, how the devil stole into the house of a young soldier's wife from her town. "Since this woman's husband was sent on service somewhere far off in the Caucasian mountains,—they say it's at the other side of the world, even farther than 'Peter,'—since he went off on duty they say that she's become intimate with our priest's son. They began to watch her and they found out that the devil had possessed her. Sometimes he takes the form of the priest's son and at other times he appears in his own person: with a wide red mouth and with ears on the very top of his head. . . ."

"Aye! Aye!" gasps the listener, crossing herself in terror.

A peasant youth sits beside a maiden from his village; she is lying with her face toward him, and he is by no means indifferent to her; he is speaking joyfully. To-morrow he will buy her some sweet beer, sweet cookies shaped like horses and little people, candies and red beads, and a little ring,—if she'll promise to dance with nobody else but him.

She laughs, showing her white teeth.

He edges up closer to her, bends over and whispers:

"I love you, may flames consume you! . . .
You're so beautiful, may wolves devour you! . . ."

She laughs louder than ever, and turns her back to him.

He begins to whisper with increased passion and more rapid speech, until he notices that she is snoring. . . . Then he becomes silent, looks for a moment through sullen eyes at her back, scratches the nape of his neck, expectorates voluminously, heaves a deep sigh, leaves her and lies down to sleep.

The horses near the wagon chew their hay and breathe stertorously. Every moment a sound, a cry, a voice is heard. Now from this direction, now from that; now nearby, now from a distance; now from a yard, now from a house. From the wagon comes the cry of a hen who has been startled in her basket. A goose cackles reply. From somewhere comes the sleepy mooing of a cow. To these sounds is joined the weeping of an infant in one of the homes. From all sides comes a chorus of snores, sighs and whispers. . . .

The fathers of the households are sleeping outside to-night, like the peasants; husband, wife and children have ceded their benches and their places upon the floor to the guests. The wife and the older daughter have gone to sleep in the store, where the Passover dishes are kept. The smaller children sleep in the

loft. The husband really doesn't sleep at all. The year is long; he will have plenty of time to sleep. He gropes around among the wagons in his yard, thrusts a sharp instrument into the sacks and thus extracts oats, corn and flaxseed, holds the material in his hand and assays its quality, considering how much it will be worth while to offer the peasant for his produce. As he gropes thus among the vehicles, he feels a cow here, a calf there, and inspects everything that is to be offered for sale. For this Jew is a connoisseur of everything; he deals in all these things. He is very careful not to arouse the sleeping peasant and his wife, who are in the wagon; so he steals about on tip-toe with bated breath.

From the blue, nocturnal sky the full moon gazes down upon the forest and pours out its slumbering beams. The treetops are spun with silver. The green hilltop now is white. White, too, are the vans, the roofs of the shops, the roofs of the houses, the somber Polish church, the backs of the horses and the cattle that are bound to the vehicles, the wagonloads of sacks, the baskets, the sleeping persons upon the carts, under them and at the side of the road, the iron wheels of the wagons, the wide sandy path, the grass—everything is white, as if sprinkled with silvery powder. . . .

And thus passes the clear summer night, stirred by

an all-pervading unrest. . . . Every sound reverberates through the luminous nocturnal atmosphere with a strange restlessness.

And now a cool breeze begins to blow,—the herald of the dawn. The night grows paler, grayer. Gray shadows spread through the village. A damp mist arises. The roofs and the grass become moist. The moon becomes pale and the silvery dust vanishes. The crowing of a rooster is heard, followed soon by another and yet another, from near and far and from all directions. The hens in the baskets upon the wagons begin to stir and flap their wings. The geese cackle nervously. The horses stamp and neigh.

The moon has set. And now the rim of the horizon is girt with flame. In the trees is heard the chirping of birds. The air grows brighter, the heavens clearer, the hillock greener,—the people, the horses, the cattle, the wagons, the houses, the market-place, become once more visible. The morning star shines in all its brilliancy. Golden bands spread over the heavens. And soon the fiery-red sun has quietly heaved into sight, inundating the hill like a wave of flame, splashing the tombstones and the monuments of the Polish cemetery with brightest gold and igniting the cross at the top of the church. Every person and everything in the community begins to stir into wakefulness,—in the houses, in the yards, and in the streets.

From one of the houses a woman has come dashing

with a basket of doughnuts. One of the peasants near a wagon has summoned her and bought several of them. The woman has taken a few groschen, has spat upon them generously, hidden them in a side pocket and walked rapidly off. The fair has begun. . . .

XVI

THE FAIR

TWO hours later the fair is in full swing. Everybody and everything has been transported to the market-place, which from afar looks like a huge, black, animated, squirming, tumultuous heap, upon which everything has been piled and mingled—human beings, horses, cattle, wagons, shops and vans. . . .

Jewish beards are moving about, amid the gray shoulders of the Gentile peasantry. The black head of a gipsy forms a striking contrast to the hoary peasant woman at his side. The head of a Jewish huckstress, with her kerchief awry, looms up from under some beard and at once merges into a white back. Now appears a horse, which, it seems, is carrying on its own head the head of a gipsy woman with her many-colored kerchief; yonder is the shaft of a wagon over a cow's back. Boots and bast shoes become confused with other shoes and hoofs. Hems of flowered skirts mingle with the white linen trousers of the peasants. For a moment a white van comes into view and is at once swallowed into the black, squirming, screaming heap. . . .

✓And there, in the center of the heap, the commo-

tion is at its greatest. . . . Business is being transacted. . . . The crowd has been waiting all year for this one day. . . . And although for the past few days nobody has slept, or eaten, or rested, none feels hunger or weariness. This is the climax of all efforts, the height of the turmoil. . . .

Jews, both men and women, with flaming cheeks and burning eyes are hard at work among the peasants' wagons, quarreling with each other, like famished persons over a crust of bread, buying and selling oats, flaxseed, flax, hides, mushrooms, hog's hair and the like, competing against one another with frightful yells; once the bargain is struck they drag the peasant and the wagonload of goods to the village money-lender's yard, where the money-lender's guests, the wealthy dealers from the city, are standing near the barn, beside a scale with large scoops. They deliver the purchased merchandise to the city dealers, and sometimes they come out the gainers by a quarter or a half ruble per customer, while at others they are fortunate to get back their original investment. . . .

Having finished their business at the money-lender's yard, they rush back to the market-place and resume their haggling around the peasant's vehicles, competing with each other anew, cursing each other anew, and once again dragging the peasant and their wagons to the money-lender's yard. Their faces are ablaze, their eyes gleam with thirst, their lips are

parched, their voices hoarse. Hands and feet, heads wearing caps whose peaks are awry, kerchiefs twisted about, eyes distended, beards, temple-locks and shoulders,—all stir incessantly in every direction.

The shops are thronged with peasants and their women. Near the vans are Jews and Jewesses, young and old, shrieking, panting, tugging at the peasants, offering them calico, various multi-colored kerchiefs, beads, brass chains, brass rings and other adornments.

On the tables are exposed for sale cakes fashioned into the semblance of animals, doughnuts, strings of candy wrapped in gold, fringed paper, sweet beer, kvass and kisloshtshi. Peasants are purchasing the doughnuts, cramming them into their mouths and into their bosoms, drinking the beer, the kvass, the kisloshtshi and biting at black bread, which they wrap around with rags. Yonder stands a group of peasants about a wagon containing a heap of new wheels, and they test the wheels by rolling them over the ground. . . .

Somewhat farther away some women are inspecting earthen vessels upon a wagon, tapping them with their fingers and listening to the ring, to assure themselves that the vessel is uncracked.

Behind a wagon laden with geese stands a peasant selling idols. A man and wife are haggling with him over the price of some of his wares, which they are holding in their hands.

And yonder speeds a gipsy on horseback. Another gipsy, with a tonsured, hatless head, runs after the horse and lashes the animal with a whip; the horse jumps, kicks his hind legs; the gipsy with the whip strikes again, until the beast dashes off at a gallop. At a short distance stand some peasants, prospective customers, chaffering about the price; nearby, a couple of Jewish horse-dealers, with shaved necks and red girdles, trying to arrange an exchange with the gipsies; all follow the rider with their eyes. And soon he returns. He dismounts, leads the horse to the peasants, rubs his fist against the animal's jaw so hard that the poor beast shudders all over, emits a snort and turns to one side.

"Tfrroo! Vasko!" cries the gipsy, tugging at the halter and dragging the horse toward him. He grasps the peasant's hands, sells his goods at last and soon disappears with the other gipsy and the Jewish horse-dealers into the crowd behind the vehicles.

On one of the wagons is seated an old gipsy woman; she is the center of a group of young men and women, and she is reading their palms. Some of them listen to her prophecies with a most serious countenance, as if she were the priest of their town delivering a sermon; others hear their fortune with beaming eyes and bashful smiles. And one of them, indeed, has buried her face in the ample white sleeve of her

kaftan and begun to sob most pitifully, while the old woman reads her palm. . . .

The children of the village scamper about the shops, around the vans, the counters and the wagons; their faces are merry and red with exertion, and some of them are sucking at long, golden candy sticks, at the same time grasping cakes; others are drawing strange sounds from the two-kopek harmonicas at their lips. . . .

Officialdom is represented, too. Every moment, it seems, the police-sergeant appears from among the vehicles, from behind a van, or around the corner of a shop. His beard is nicely groomed, his eyes wander over the heads of the multitude, and his right hand reposes upon his sheathed sword.

The crowd, however, is so engrossed that it fails to notice the officer. Only when, because of the dense gathering, the sergeant has to force his way through, and he brushes people aside with his powerful shoulders, does the crowd perceive the presence of authority, first in their ribs and then visually. No sooner do the men and women catch sight of him than they are seized with confusion, grasp their hats, step back deferentially, allow him to pass, humbly bowing before him and smiling meekly. . . .

The sergeant, however, makes no reply to this salute. He does not even deign to look down upon his subjects. His distended eyes stare sternly straight

ahead of him. At a distance he sees the apothecary, standing in the open door of his place. The druggist nods to him. And the high dignitary answers the druggist's greeting by raising his hand to his cap in military fashion. For he feels some slight respect for this fellow. Although the druggist is only a Jew, he often plays cards with the higher officials,—with the captain of police. And again, the police-sergeant often suffers from stomach-aches and cramps, and the apothecary has numerous cures for these afflictions. . . .

The Jewish village instructor appears in the crowd. He walks along with his nose in the air, with the knob of his cane in his mouth, looking distractedly in every direction. A wagon almost runs him down, and he jumps to one side; he is knocked in the teeth by his own cane, whereupon he pulls it out of his mouth and spits upon his hands to see whether he is bleeding; meanwhile a wave of excited human beings dashes against him and washes him along before it. "A fellow can be killed here!" he tells himself, and proceeds to a spot where there is less crowding. A Jewish horse-dealer comes flying toward him on horse-back, with a whizz and a yelling; the instructor jumps back and stumbles against an old peasant woman, who showers him with curses. He becomes more confused than ever. "Better get out of this," he tells himself. At this juncture he catches sight of the

druggist, and it occurs to him, that he will buy a newspaper at the apothecary's and go off to the woods to read it. So he begins to elbow through the crowd anew, when suddenly he notices that the sergeant has approached the druggist. Now how's a fellow to have a lion heart and not feel fear in such a moment? A sergeant is a sergeant. . . . Well, he doesn't need the newspaper so badly. It's not a matter of life or death. He'll get the paper to-morrow. . . .

And he disappears behind the shops. . . .

Some Jewish butchers with shaved necks and red girdles are standing around a flock of cattle raising a din; one of them, a red-headed fellow, is threatening a black-bearded chap with his balled fist. "You thief, you! Swindler!" The other butchers restrain him, holding his sleeve and his coat-tails. The Jew with the black beard sticks his thumb derisively through his index finger and the next, and points this "fig" at the would-be assailant, who shouts "Let me go! I'll bury him on the spot!" The other fellow turns his back toward him, lifts his coat-tails high in the air and cries: "Did you see this?" The eyes of the red-bearded Jew glitter like those of an infuriated bull; the veins of his neck swell, and he bellows: "Let me at him, I say!" He begins to struggle with the men who are holding him, wildly shaking his head about and kicking madly. . . . He tears himself free at last and makes a dash for the Jew with

the black beard; the latter rushes likewise upon him and their hands close in a clutch upon each other's shoulders; they glare at each other through blood-shot eyes, gnashing their teeth as they wrestle. The red-beard speaks: "I'll kill you on the spot!" The black-beard: "Well, well! Try it! . . ." Whereupon they begin to kick at each other, without releasing their hold upon each other's shoulders; the red-beard and the gnashing teeth get nearer and nearer to the black-beard, and the black-beard with the gnashing teeth gets nearer to the red, as if they are crouching forward to kiss each other. . . . And suddenly—thump! The red-beard shudders, his hat falls to the ground, and soon the butcher with the red beard is himself stretched out upon the sod. He springs up, seizes a shaft from one of the wagons and begins to bellow wildly. Men rush over to him and are once again forced to restrain his fury.

A crowd has gathered: Jews and Jewesses, children, peasants and their women. . . . A shout arises: "Hush! The sergeant!" The butcher with the red-beard cannot contain himself. He struggles with those who are holding him, and keeps on crying: "Let me at him, I say! He wishes to fight with me, does he? He's looking for more, is he? . . ."

"Hush, Jews!" cries a Jewess. "The lord with the brass buttons is coming!"

"What do I care for him!" yells the red-bearded

butcher. "I'll settle with him myself. One funeral will be too few for him!"

The sergeant comes running up to the scene with his beard in disarray. The crowd steps back and makes way for him.

"Hey, what?" demands the official in stern tones.

The bystanders volunteer information. Two Jews who have come to the fair from the outlying towns have been quarreling.

"Fighting, too?" he asks.

"Fighting, too."

The Jew with the black beard approaches the officer.

"Gaspodin Police-Sergeant, your grace! He is a butcher and I am a butcher, and we both bought this ox here. So he must pay half and I must pay the other half. Well, he didn't have enough money. Then do I owe him half of the ox, ha, your grace?"

"That's not my affair. And you mustn't dare to fight hereabouts!" replies the sergeant harshly.

"And I'll rip his guts out for him!" yells the butcher with the red beard, who has just been released by his friends. "He's a thief and a bandit!" . . .

"Quiet!" shouts the sergeant.

"Jew," counsels an aged Jew of the village, addressing the red-beard, "don't have too much to say to the sergeant. . . ."

"Sergeant, 'pergeant! ! Fie on the governor him-

self! I've got a passport!" answers the butcher with the red beard, in Yiddish.

At these words the Jews of the village look in terror toward the policeman, and the black-bearded Jew rushes over to the official excitedly.

"Your grace, did you hear what he said? He said he isn't afraid of the governor himself! By God! . . ."

"Ha, what? What did you say?" And the sergeant turns to the red-bearded butcher.

"I've got a passport," replies the latter, now intimidated.

"And did you insult the government?"

"I have a passport," asserts the butcher, in a softer voice than ever, looking about him with increasing uneasiness.

"I'm asking you: did you insult the government?"

"No," stammers the butcher. "I have a pass—a pa. . . ."

"He *did* make insulting remarks!" interjects the butcher with the black beard.

Whereupon a commotion arises amid the Jews and the Jewesses. The idea! To think that a Jew should act as informant against another Jew. . . . But they are afraid to venture these remarks aloud in the presence of the sergeant.

And when the sergeant turns to them, to the Jews of his acquaintance, with the inquiry as to whether

the man really made any disparaging statements, some of the crowd sneak off, others shrug their shoulders, and still others shake their heads in denial. Nobody has heard any such thing.

The sergeant, however, does not release the Jew with the red beard. He has insulted the government. The officer believes the accusing Jew. And such a thing must under no circumstances be permitted. The culprit must come along with him. Whereupon a Jew with terror in his eyes dashes over to the captive butcher and whispers into his ear: "He wishes you to slip something into his hand; slip him a ruble and let him go to . . ."

A little while later the sergeant has had something "slipped into his hand," and the Jew with the red beard, together with the Jew of the black beard, has gone off to the Rabbi to have him settle the controversy. . . .

Before the day is more than half over, many begin to leave the village. Out of the yards come vans, carts and wagons with a clatter and rattle, going off in all directions, over all the roads, disappearing beyond the village in clouds of white dust.

Now there is more room.

From afar the market may be easily distinguished, with its vans, its tables and its shops. The people and the horses and the wagons may now be made out with no difficulty.

The tumult, however, is quite as great as before. . . . Many a peasant and peasant woman is still left in the village, and they set about getting drunk and making merry. People guzzle in the houses, in the yards, and drink and dance upon the market-place. . . .

Here and there intoxicated peasants may be seen with filmy eyes, holding flasks of schnapps and little glasses, shouting, cursing, and exchanging affectionate kisses.

In one corner a countryman is playing upon a harmonica, varying the concert with a song in his drunken voice.

From another corner come the wild, jolly notes of a kamarinskaya, pouring forth from a violin, accompanied by the stamping of feet to the rhythm of the dance.

Yonder at the foot of the green hill from which the forest looks down, merry peasant youths and maidens are whirling in a joyous round. The ample white sleeves of the kaftans and the hems of the short skirts sway and flutter as if blown by a strong wind.

A drunken peasant with drooping head, hatless, his beard trickling with the saliva that has drooled from his mouth, comes driving out of a yard. He squirms hither and thither on his seat. His bony nag drags along as if she, too, were intoxicated, and can barely hold her head up. The driver has let go

of the reins and is looking for them, groping in the air, moving his lips and mumbling something in a nasal tone, talking to himself.

The wheels of his wagon lock with those of another, and he receives the blow of a whip across his shoulder; this wakes him from his slumber; he stares around through dull, glassy eyes and licks his lips as if he were smacking them over some dainty dish. Then, when his nag has managed to make a fresh start, he finds the reins, lies upon the seat, face downward, and bursts forth into song with great gusto.

The sergeant now struts about the village with his hands folded behind his back; he stops before every house and peeks furtively in through the windows, thrusting in half his beard. Whereupon a Jew or a Jewess comes dashing out of the house with a wearied expression, places one hand in that of the official, and fawningly pats him upon the shoulder. He nods most graciously and one of his hands disappears from his back into a pocket. He proceeds on his way, with his hands folded across his back; again his beard is thrust through an open window of some Jewish dwelling, and again a wan-faced man or woman hastens out, and the official once more feels the caress of a hand upon his back. . . .

By nightfall everybody from out of town had rid-

den home. The last to go was a drunken, bleeding peasant. . . .

Of the Jewish visitors, only the two wealthy dealers remained at the money-lender's home; they had still before them the work of arranging the purchased goods upon the wagons; there were a few more men and women, who were concluding matches between their sons and daughters.

The village had suddenly fallen asleep, as if after a wild carouse. It was weary and broken up, utterly without strength. Only now did the men and women in the shops begin to feel an aching in their hands and feet, a heaviness in the head and in the eyes. The children were overcome with a burdensome yearning, like after a great holiday which is followed by long, long, dragging weeks filled with gloom. . . .

And later, when the moon above the wood gazed down upon the village, it beheld upon the marketplace heaps of filth, shattered flasks and glasses, broken axles and grease kegs. . . .

In the houses, too, there was a superabundance of dirt and disorder. The floors were wet, filthy; in the corners lay fragments of broken vessels, on the table stood plates containing abandoned fish soup, fish bones and heads of herring. The benches were overturned. The people, too, were covered with grime, and their faces, their hands and their clothes were no neater than the floor. . . .

But they had no strength now to think of cleanliness. They were unable to think even of the profits that the fair had brought them. They threw themselves upon their beds and resting-places with heavy heads and eyes, and fell soon asleep like exhausted beasts. . . .

Not until the next morning did they calculate their gains. Some very early discovered that they had done better the previous year: that they had earned no less than three rubles more a year before. . . . Others found that the present fair had been a most profitable one indeed: they had earned fully ten rubles. . . . Others still wrung their hands: "Woe, woe! How hard we labored, and what did we get out of it? . . ."

The money-lender was altogether jubilant. He had made his fifty rubles. Mottel made less this year than the year before; all of three rubles less. His wife sobbed at the news, and he consoled her: "You little goose, you. Can a few rubles make such a difference? We should thank God for what He was pleased to send. Better than nothing."

The Rabbi, too, realized less from controversial fees than he did on the previous year. So, at least, said the Rabbi's wife to Mottel when she came to his shop next morning to purchase two kopeks' worth of oatmeal. Shmeril the cobbler, on the other hand, was in high spirits. This fair day he had made all of

three rubles on patches, and on the next morning he had gulped down more than one good glass of brandy. He even treated Sholom the Gentile and a few other good fellows to a glass, slapped them across the shoulders and cried enthusiastically:

“Ha? If every day were only fair-day, ha? We’d live like noblemen, ha? Ha? Isn’t that so? Your health! . . .”

That same day the whole village knew just how each of its inhabitants had fared. So-and-so was highly elated: his daughter had landed a beau,—the son of such-and-such; he was a mighty fine fellow, and had exacted a very small dowry. . . . And some other man’s son had made a really excellent match: he had been betrothed to a rich butcher’s daughter and was to get a fat dowry and board and lodging into the bargain. . . .

Other mothers and daughters felt gnawing envy awaken in their hearts, but the fathers consoled them: “Well, well. What of it? Who knows? At next year’s fair perhaps God will be good to us, too. . . .”

XVII

LOVE IN THE VILLAGE

ON the morning after the fair all was gladness in the home of Mirke. In the first place, Mirke had made no less than fifteen silver rubles in her shop on the day before. Secondly,—and this was indeed a stroke of fortune,—a sweetheart had been found for Leah.

As Leah stood in the shop helping her mother because of the increased patronage brought by the fair, she suddenly caught sight of lame Gedaliah passing by in company of a young man; both of them stopped to look at her. Her heart gave a terrible thump and the little shovel, filled with salt, fell out of her fingers. Lame Gedaliah was a botching tailor, a fellow who made his living chiefly by converting second-hand clothes into new garments, turning them inside out, and by sewing new suits for the children out of their parents' cast off clothes. But he conducted another business on the side: match-making. And this was why Leah's heart pounded so excitedly when she noticed Gedaliah and the young man cast eyes upon her. They walked on, but soon returned. And all at once it dawned upon Leah that

they were headed for her mother's shop. Her face blushed with flame and she glided over to her mother, sobbing out: "Oy, mama, I'm dressed like a slob." Mirke, who happened to be busy with a peasant customer, was startled out of her wits. "What? What?" But on noticing the presence of Gedaliah and the young man, she very soon realized that this was a matter of matchmaking. She quickly got rid of the customer, giving him his package of cheap native tobacco, wiped her nose, which was covered with flour, and greeted Gedaliah with a jovial mien:

"What's the good news, Reb Gedaliah?" And meanwhile she stole a glance at the youth, and continued in even more cordial fashion:

"My little Leah, blessings upon her, is helping me out to-day. I tell you! She has golden, fairy fingers. May no evil eye gaze upon her, she's the most industrious creature in the world. I thought that she was good only for cooking, washing, sewing and such. But she's a wonder for business, too; nobody can equal her at it! . . ."

"Takes after her mother!" responded Gedaliah, grasping his pointed beard in his fist, pulling at it and smiling, and shaking his head in a manner which Mirke found it very easy to interpret, whereupon she beamed with dazzling radiance.

"The Lord be praised. I needn't be ashamed of my children. You know that, Reb Gedaliah. . . ."

Leah stood there in a maze, her cheeks as red as fire. She would gladly have run home, yet something restrained her. She desired to get a good look at the young man, and dare not raise her eyes to look at him furtively. . . .

The youth, tall, broad and sturdy, with a full, florid, good-natured face, a little black beard and a thick neck, whence it seemed that the very blood was spurting, was dressed in a long cloth coat with flapping coat-tails, boots, and a white tie over a black shirt-front.

He glanced at buxom, blooming Leah from the corner of his eye and it was very evident that she pleased him. He ventured to speak, at last, in a half-embarrassed tone:

“Do you keep hand-rolled cigarettes?”

“Certainly!” Mirke hastened to reply. “Leah, my darling, give the gentleman the cigarettes!”

Leah was startled. Cigarettes? She hurried to her mother’s side and whispered: “I can’t. . . . My eyes are on fire. . . . I’m not decently dressed. How would I look? . . .”

And she dashed out of the shop.

“A pure child. Ashamed of a young man. . . . I’ll serve you. How many cigarettes would you like, long life to you?”

“About ten. . . .”

The young man lighted a cigarette, went out into

the street and stopped near the entrance to the shop, gazing upon the fair.

Gedaliah was left alone with Mirke.

"You understand, of course, Mirke, that this is a chance for a match?"

"You don't have to put it into my mouth, Reb Gedaliah."

"It's a blessing from God, I tell you. And he took a liking to your girl at first sight. . . ."

Some peasants entered. Mirke attended to their wants and returned to Gedaliah.

"Reb Gedaliah, my dear man, go over to Mayshe-Itsye; if this should really turn out well, you'll probably catch a good fee. . . ."

While this was going on Leah was in hiding behind a wagon opposite her mother's store, spying upon the young man with a palpitating heart and drinking him in with her eyes. When, somewhat later, Gedaliah issued from the store, she heard him say to the youth: "Don't worry. I'll arrange the match for you. She's a wonderful maiden, a blessing from God!" And now something shrieked exultantly within her. "Oh, mother!" And she scurried homeward. . . .

That night after the fair had come to an end and Mirke sat wearily in her shop her husband Mayshe-Itsye came in.

"Well? Was Gedaliah to see you?" queried Mirke languidly.

"That's just what I came to talk over with you. Really . . ."

"Yes? . . ."

He told her that the prospective husband was a blacksmith from a nearby village, and had served in the army. As soon as she heard that he had been in the army she declared then and there that a match with a soldier and an ordinary toiler was out of the question. If he were only a goldsmith, or a watchmaker . . ."

"But a watchmaker or a goldsmith would not, in all likelihood, care to enter our family," retorted Mayshe-Itsye. "Skilled tradesmen, my little goose, and such folk ask for a large dowry. . . ."

"And how big a dowry does he ask?"

"A hundred and fifty rubles would satisfy him," answered Mayshe-Itsye.

"A bargain, indeed! Where does he come in for such a sum? A soldier and a blacksmith, and has the impudence to expect one hundred and fifty rubles! . . ."

"A hundred and fifty rubles dowry isn't so much for a husband. . . ."

"And where are you going to get them?" asked Mirke.

"What do you mean, 'where'? And where is God, do you think?" he retorted, with devotion in his voice. "For the present we can give him a note and God

will be good. Don't worry. The Lord of the Universe has enough to go round for His people of Israel. . . ."

"Indeed, if God pleases, He sends fortune.—Take this very day, for example. I made fifteen rubles. So let us trust Him to send us a more respectable match, too."

"Well, praised and thanked be God for the good news," replied Mayshe-Itsye with pious accents. "God is good. I told Leah the same. But she, the wicked creature. . . . I slapped her face for her! . . ."

"You slapped Leah? Then may your hands indeed fall off! What do you think,—that she's one of your Hebrew pupils?" growled Mirke aggressively.

"Then let her not be so impudent. There I was, telling Gedaliah that a soldier is no match for my daughter, when she interrupts with 'Yes, a match! What sort of a match do you expect, anyway,—Rothschild's son? And if your own son is a soldier, must he bury himself on that account?' Did you ever hear such words from a hussy? Such audacity,—to meddle in our affairs. . . ."

For a few moments Mirke was silent, lost in thought. Then she suddenly exclaimed:

"Really, what have we got to be so proud about? Our own son is a soldier, and my father was himself

a toiler,—a capmaker,—and have we reason to be ashamed on that account? Perhaps the match is a predestined one. . . .”

“But a blacksmith—soldier,” grumbled Mayshe-Itsye.

“Don’t be a horse, Mayshe-Itsye. Leah is by no means a young girl. When I was her age I already had almost three children.”

Mayshe-Itsye heaved a deep sigh.

“We-ell . . . I don’t know. . . . Maybe. . . .”

“How about his family?”

“He has a mother. She came along with him. He also has a cow and a smithy of his own. And brothers in America.”

“You don’t say! In America?”

“In America. Beyond all the seas. Under the earth. . . .”

“Do you see. A great many Jews, they say, travel from the four corners of the world to America, in these days. . . .”

“Such notions folks take into their heads.”

“Gedaliah says that everybody there is a Rothschild. They send money to their mothers, five and ten rubles at a time. . . .”

“Is that so-o-o? So she has rich sons there? Then it looks as if what I heard in Vitebsk, when I was there a year ago, is true after all. . . .”

“What was that?”

"That in America even the poorest people have meat and rolls to eat every day."

"Goodness, how can that be? . . ."

At this moment lame Gedaliah happened to enter.

"Don't be too particular, Mayshe-Itsye," he warned. "You're letting a blessing from God slip through your fingers. . . ."

The conclusion was that Mirke asked him to bring the young man and his mother to her house the following morning at ten, if God should spare them all until then.

And now, which is to say the morning after the fair, Mirke's house bustled with preparations for receiving the groom and his mother. The place was as tidy as upon a holiday; the floor was sprinkled with golden sand; the table was decked with a white cloth. Leah had spent the whole night cleaning up. Mirke was arrayed in Sabbath attire, and had sent little Shlayme to take charge of the shop, with the admonition that he must in God's name under no circumstances purloin any sweets. On this day Mayshe-Itsye sent his little students back home and put on his Sabbath attire, too. So, too, old Avrom-Layzer. As to Leah, she donned her pink dress, braided a blue ribbon into her red hair and went about as in a dream. The younger boys, who had no shoes, were given a kopek apiece for candy, and were sent out upon the street to play; the two younger girls also donned their

best and likewise braided ribbons into their hair.

At last they came. First, lame Gedaliah with his cane; behind him the groom, followed by his mother, —a tall, well-built old woman with a florid countenance, hands as red as beets and a kerchief over her head. For years she had served as housemaid in a large city, at the home of a wealthy family; for the past three years, however, she had dwelt in retirement with her son the blacksmith, on the money sent to her from America by her two sons there.

Leah now became more confused than ever; her face was a glowing flame. Her mother sat her down beside the groom's parent, and herself took a seat at the other side. Mayshe-Itsye placed a flask of brandy and a saucer of preserves upon the table. Then he seated himself near the groom, who was beside old Avrom-Layzer, opposite his mother and Leah. Lame Gedaliah was at the end of the table, and was nodding to Leah's two sisters, who were standing to one side, casting furtive glances toward the groom.

That fellow, the former soldier, who had met more than one girl in the "big city" in which he had served, now eyed Leah far more boldly than on the previous day, and surveyed her from every angle. She felt his glances upon her and kept her eyes lowered.

✓ Then the groom's mother propped her chin upon

her hand, shook her head and spoke loud, that all might hear:

"She's no weakling,—made for hard work. She'll be able to do plenty of labor. She strikes me favorably, my son."

Leah lowered her eyes more than ever, and the groom smiled good-naturedly.

Mirke burst forth, with a beaming countenance:

"Girls like Leah simply can't be found in these days, even if you look the whole world over."

"She strikes me favorably," repeated the groom's mother. "She's no weakling."

"And what's your name, long life to you?" she suddenly asked, turning to Leah.

"Leah," replied the latter, bashfully.

"And how old are you, may you live to a hundred and twenty?"

"Just turned eighteen, may she live to a hundred and twenty," came the hasty reply from Mirke.

Lame Gedaliah entered the conversation at this point.

"I said eighteen, too. For I'm a friend of the family. I know. . . ."

"She looks to be a little older," commented the prospective husband's mother. "But perhaps that's her nature. Orre, I'm satisfied with her, my son. . . ."

And here the groom himself became bold enough to venture a word, in a deep, bass voice:

"No offense, kind folks, but before we go any further we must make sure that everything's being done methodically. . . . When it comes to marrying, you must understand . . ."

He began to brandish his powerful fists, with which he had mastered many a horse while shoeing the beast, and continued to speak:

"You understand? A bride . . . a wife. . . . That's no cat in a sack. . . . You've got to have a talk with her, eye to eye. . . . You never can tell. . . . You understand me, of course? No offense, I hope. . . ."

Gedaliah interrupted with, "Of course, of course. He's right, upon my soul. Leah darling, go out for a little walk with him. Show him that you're no fool, God forbid. . . ."

Mayshe-Itsye rose to object.

"What do you call this? Like . . . just like . . . we-ell? Fie!"

Old Avrom-Layzer, too, shook his hoary head in dissent and grumbled:

"A burly bumpkin!"

Leah was thrown into confusion.

Gedaliah cried out angrily:

"Reb Mayshe-Itsye, don't be a boor. You don't know the world. He simply wishes to have a con-

versation with her, because that's the way things are done these days. Maybe she has some defect? Maybe she is deaf? Maybe she's a stupid nag, a silly cow, a good-for-nothing? . . ."

"Hush, hush," counseled Mirke smilingly. "What's all the talk about? I'm a modern woman. By all means let them go out and take a walk, in the best of health, and return in the best of health, and, if it is so ordained by heaven, marry in the best of health. Go, daughter. Don't be ashamed. . . ."

She thrust her daughter forward from the table, and herself arose, too. The groom likewise stood up.

"A-akh!" groaned old Avrom-Layzer, shaking his head in disapproval.

"Well, well, well!" grumbled Mayshe-Itsye, shrugging his thin shoulders.

But Mirke shoved Leah out of the door after the groom, with the parting advice: "Don't be ashamed, little goose, don't be ashamed!"

Leah was so upset she could not see her way out. . . .

Mayshe-Itsye hastened to his wife's side.

"Shameless one, what do you call this? Do you think they're a pair of peasants?"

Mirke replied in a soft voice:

"You blockhead, you. Don't meddle. Can't you see that he's on fire for her, and that his very eyes are bulging out of their sockets? We may be able to

match her off to him without paying a kopek's worth of dowry, and remember that she's twenty-four years old. Silence, may you be stricken dumb! . . ."

Then she joined the groom's mother, stroked her shoulder fondly, sat down beside her and asked:

"What is your name, long life to you?"

"Mariasha," replied the woman. "And you, long life to you?"

"Mirke. If it is so fated, we will be relatives by marriage."

"May the Lord of the Universe send that good fortune. I like the girl. She's none of your skinny, scraggy creatures like the others that we've been to look over. May no evil eye glance at her, she's a maiden as sound as a tree. There's plenty of hard work in her. . . . What good could a weakling wife be to my Orre? You've seen him. May no evil eye harm him, he can break a horseshoe with his five fingers. . . ."

"So-o-o? A horseshoe? So? An iron one? Heavens! Do you hear, Mayshe-Itsye?"

"Why not?" came the retort. "He lost no strength in studying the Holy Law, God be praised. If he had been a Talmud scholar, he'd probably have my vigor."

"Hush!" cried Mirke, glaring daggers at him.

In the meantime Gedaliah had helped himself to some brandy.

“Your health! . . .”

“Long life and happiness.”

Mirke offered preserves and brandy to Mariasha.

Then Mariasha began to speak of her two other sons, who were in America. It was already twenty years since they had gone thither from the city, where they worked for a tinsmith. To-day, thank God, they were wealthy men, and often sent her money from America. They asked her to come to them, but she was afraid to drag her weary old bones to the devil knew where. She would really like to see them. They had such beautiful little children there. She was simply dying to see her grandchildren, but perhaps it was so fated that she shouldn't. Orre had wished to journey thither, too, even before he had been drafted for service, but she had wept and wailed, until she succeeded in preventing his departure. . . .

“A fine trick, to drag your bones under the earth,” declared Mirke. “We'll have plenty of time for that in a hundred and twenty years.”

“By God!” came from Gedaliah's corner. “I'd just like to see what sort of place this America is. One of my niece's children from Minsk journeyed to that country; he was a pauper there,—a tailor, so they tell me,—and in America he became a rich man altogether,—a manufacturer with a factory all his own. . . .”

“Yes, they really say,” interjected Mirke, “that

the very poorest people there eat meat and rolls every day. . . .”

“Akh, akh,” commented Mayshe-Itsye as he shrugged his shoulders, “women speak only nonsense! You mere woman, you,—where are your brains? How could you ever believe such folly? Now listen,” he declared, with the sing-song of the pious readings, “if he eats meat and rolls every day, what does that show? That he is not a poor man. And if he *is* a poor man, then he can’t eat meat and rolls every day. Fool! . . .”

“He’s really right,” agreed Mirke. “A man understands more than a woman, after all.”

Now Gedaliah chimed in:

“Who can tell what things are like yonder? Perhaps food grows on the trees over there? . . . The instructor who teaches my children writing, once told me, that when we have day, it’s night in America, and when we have night, they have daylight. Everything is just the opposite to what we have. Why, a Jew may become even a policeman over there. . . .”

“Who can say? They tell all manner of miracles about the country,” said old Avrom-Layzer all at once. “Only a short while ago I was told a host of wonders about another country somewhere. . . .”

“Argentina!” cried Gedaliah. “That was several years ago. That plan of Baron Hirsch’s. . . . Yes, yes, of course. . . .”

"And to-day—who, what, when?" continued Avrom-Layzer. "They've forgotten that country and they're talking about another. Ah, wherever God sends His aid, there folks eat meat, rolls, and even marchpanes.¹ And if the Lord withholds His help, then it's . . . it's . . . bad everywhere!"

By this time Leah and Orre returned from their walk. Orre's face wore a smile of satisfaction; Leah had shed her embarrassment and felt now unrestrained, her pleasure visible upon her glowing countenance. He was highly pleasing to her, and felt that she was no less agreeable to him; on their stroll to the outskirts of the village they had met girls of her acquaintance, who had stolen envious glances at them. These she had detected. Her soul was jubilant. . . .

The next evening the wedding contract was drawn up and Mayshe-Itsye gave, as dowry, a note for one hundred and fifty rubles, which, he devoutly hoped, the good Lord in Heaven would help him meet on the day of the wedding. . . .

And on the day following the engagement, when the groom was supposed to leave for home, Leah felt that he was taking her heart away with him, and when he met her alone in the entry, she wept. He understood, and placed his arms about her waist in such a

¹ The English sense of something dainty has become obsolete; that connotation is still common in Yiddish.

manner that she all but shrieked. And his kiss, the first kiss that she had ever received from a young man, robbed her of her voice, took her breath away and almost deprived her of her reason. . . .

XVIII

NEWS OF AMERICA IN THE VILLAGE

THE match with Orre was altogether a fortunate one. At the wedding, which was celebrated in Mirke's home soon after the first days of Succoth (The Feast of the Tabernacles)—for such was the groom's desire—Mayshe-Itsye was unable, as may have been foreseen, to pay the one hundred and fifty rubles dowry, for which he had given a note, but the marriage was not interfered with by that contingency. And from America came a gift of no less than a hundred rubles for the bride and bridegroom.

After the wedding Leah left with her husband for his town, whence she sent her parents letters filled with her happiness.

Thus winter passed. . . .

Once—three weeks after Passover—Leah and her husband came on an unexpected visit to her parents. They arrived to say farewell. They were going off to America. . . .

Mirke wrung her hands and broke into lamentations:

“Woe is me, are you crazy?”

Mayshe-Itsye, too, was horrified.

"What does this mean? Can it be possible? . . . Is that Orre's idea?"

"No, papa, it's my own notion. I persuaded him and mother-in-law to go. He has wealthy brothers there, who ask us to come, and it would be foolish for us to remain here. Must he be a blacksmith all his life? We've already received our tickets from America and we've sold the smithy, too, and everything, and we're going to America!"

In vain were Mirke's weeping, Mayshe-Itsye's arguments, and old Avrom-Layzer's entreaties. Nothing could avail. . . .

Then Mirke ran to her mother's grave, and cried in despair:

"Mother! Mother! Woe is me! Misfortune is me! The crown of our heads, Leah, the light of our eyes, is forsaking us! She is dragging her youthful bones away off to America, woe is me! Mother! Mother! She will have to sail over deep, deep seas, across vast deserts, deep under the earth, woe is her mother! Mother! Mother! Pray to God that He at least bring her there in safety! . . ."

This was the first time that the graves of the Jewish graveyard in the village of B—— had heard the name of America. . . .

A week later the entire vicinity was astir with the news that Leah, the daughter of Mirke, had gone to

America with her husband. . . . The women seated upon turf-mounds spoke of it, the shopkeepers on the market-place and the girls with whom she had formerly mingled, found no other topic of conversation. Friday, somebody related in the bath-house that she was journeying to wealthy brothers-in-law, who were veritable Rothschilds in America, who dwelt in golden palaces and rode about in golden carriages, and that night, at Sabbath eve prayer, every synagogue buzzed with the news; the next day, when the maidens of the village were seated under the trees in their bright Sabbath dresses, with the colored ribbons in their heads, they did not sing the usual songs, but spoke only of Leah, of America, of Leah's rich brothers-in-law with their palaces and golden carriages. . . .

"There was luck for you," exclaimed winsome, buxom Chayke, the daughter of Mottel, enviously. "It happens, of course, that a beautiful maiden sometimes lands a fortune; but such a—may God not punish me for my words—such an ugly creature with a face like a crow, a red cat. . . ."

"There,—that's just the kind that have all the luck," offered Chyene, Shmeril the cobbler's daughter, the village belle,—a maiden with the face of a young gipsy girl, with thick, black, lustrous braids and charming black eyes that glowed with flame. Every time the sergeant of the village saw her upon the street, he would stop his cart and cry to her:

"Hey there, Chyene, would you like a ride? Come, ride a bit with me."

And when she showed her white teeth in derision, answering, in Yiddish, "Ride to hell, will you!" he would burst into laughter, not being able to understand what she was saying, would stroke his beard and repeat his invitation:

"Come, Chyene. I'll buy you cake and candy." Thereupon she would reply in Russian, with a coquettish smile:

"Very well, noble sir. I'll send out my brother Selig, and you'll give him the candy and the sweets for me. . . ."

"No. You come yourself, Chyene. . . ."

Then she would bubble over with laughter and go on her way.

And after he had whipped his horse and the vehicle had started off, he would look back more than once through the cloud of dust that whirled after the carriage, and cry out:

"You Jewess! You Jewess!"

She, too, was envious of Leah's good fortune.

Among the girls to-day was also Sholom the Gentle's oldest daughter, Broche the forelady, a healthy blonde with a pale face, a perk, snub nose and blue eyes, closely resembling a Lettish maiden. For three years she had been working in one of the city stores, and had come for a few days on a visit to her town,

to see her mother. She was dressed in better style than her companions, and considered herself an urbane personage amid a set of provincial girls. The girls all looked upon her with respect, because they knew that yonder in the big city she was conducting a clandestine love affair with a certain clerk, just like a heroine in one of Shomer's or Blaustein's novels.

She suddenly appealed to her companions:

"Girls, if you'll promise not to let it out, I'll tell you something that nobody in the world knows except me and a certain other party."

And she uttered the words "and a certain other party" with such a mysterious expression that it seemed they had been whispered out of her blue eyes. . . .

The girls broke into a goose-like cackle:

"Oh, do tell us! Tell us! We won't breathe a word! . . ."

And they edged up closer to her, crawling over the grass on their knees, stretching out their necks and focussing their eyes hungrily upon her lips.

"First swear that you will tell nobody."

"May our tongues be paralyzed!"

"May we not live to speak to our fathers and mothers!" vowed others.

"And may you not live to speak to your sweet-hearts, ha?" demanded Broche.

"Yes," they chorused.

"Then remember," she cried, and began to divulge her secret in a hushed voice:

"Girls, I, too, am going to America."

"You? ! . . ."

"Hush, hush! Not so loud!" whispered Broche. "My sweetheart,"—she uttered this word with mysterious tones,—“has wished to make the journey for a long time. As soon as we receive our tickets from there, we'll be off! . . ."

A silence descended upon her hearers; they looked at one another in speechless amazement.

"Remember, now. For the present, not a word, girls! . . ."

"Not a sound!" they began to assure her from all sides. And every girl felt more respect for her than ever.

All at once, one of the girls asked softly: "And you're not at all afraid to sail over the deep seas?"

And from a second:

"And is America really under the earth?"

"I'm sure I don't know what silly things folks imagine in this little village of yours!" replied Broche. "America isn't under the earth; it's you people who are deep down!"

"True," agreed Chayke, Mottel's daughter. "That is the truth itself, Broche dear. We're all of us buried deep in the earth, here!"

"And in America," continued their informant,

"they welcome one of us girls with open arms. It's the girls who receive the dowries, not the fellows. Now take a girl like you, Chyenke,—or like you, Chayke,—or even like you, Roshke,—over there you'd marry nothing less than a Count. They'd fall all over themselves running after you."

The faces of the three girls she had indicated blazed like a conflagration.

"Really?"

"You don't say!"

"And they actually chase after girls like us?"

"Yes, and shower you with gold into the bargain," asserted Broche.

"How have you learned all this? You were never there, Broche?" asked one of the homely maidens who had, indeed, all been offended at Broche's failure to include them together with the three she had mentioned by name.

"Who then should know? You, perhaps?" retorted Broche with scorn. "My dear little girl, I know a great many things that you don't. But I'll tell you how I know. My sweetheart's brother-in-law and sister write all these things to him in their letters. My sweetheart's sister married a man there who covers her, as big as she is, from head to foot with diamonds. . . . If you could only see their photographs, girls, that they sent from America. I tell you, they live like ki-i-ings! . . ."

The maidens were all plunged into thought. A dream shone in their eyes.

And now several young men happened to come walking along.

Broche called out to them, winking at the same time.

"Behold the cavaliers! Such long faces on them! Temple-locks, and bits of cotton-wadding stuck in their ears, and snot running from their noses. Oh, mother of mine, I'll faint!"

"Well, and yours?" asked one of the group.

"Mine? Aha! Not to be mentioned in the same breath. . . . An up-to-date fellow, a cavalier, with such a bewitching mustache! . . ."

And Broche passed her fingers across her upper lip, winking as she did so.

Later, when the young men began to get lively, stealing glances in the direction of the girls, the maidens all arose and left the spot. Somehow or other these familiar provincial fellows had lost all attraction in their eyes. . . .

XIX

THE FIRST LETTER FROM AMERICA

THE first letter from Mirke's daughter Leah has arrived from America, and it is filled with good news. Mirke weeps for joy and begs her Mayshe-Itsye to read it for her, over and over again. . . . Mayshe-Itsye reads it and is so deeply moved that he keeps pulling at his nose and swallowing his tears. Old Avrom-Layzer bends over toward his son-in-law, with his ear well-cocked to catch the words, the end of his flowing white beard clutched in his fist; he is careful not to lose a word of the letter, and his countenance glows with an expression of wonderment. Leah's sisters read the letter, too, in agitated voices, and tears of joy glitter in their eyes. Even little Shlayme is seized with the happiness of the occasion; during the past year he has grown taller, paler, thinner, but he has remained the same mischievous creature as before. And for sheer joy he begins to beg: "Mama, give me a kopek!" And for sheer joy Mirke gives him a kopek at once, bestowing the same largess upon the other children, too. Then she seizes the letter and dashes off with a glowing face to the

market-place, that the shopkeepers may read the wonderful news.

✓ And somewhat later Mottel is standing before his store, reading the selfsame letter in a loud voice, with Mirke beside him, surrounded by all the storekeepers and the women who own the market stands; all listen to the letter with mouths agape and eyes distended in wonder. Mirke drinks in every word, smiles with enthusiasm, wipes her eyes and every other moment interrupts Mottel's reading. "Oh, thanks be to God! Do you hear? Well, what do you say to *that*, ha? . . ."

And the rest shake their heads, smack their lips and murmur their wonderment.

"My, my! Ay! Ay! . . ."

✓ "Why not confess it?" reads Mottel. "Never in my life have I seen what I saw at the home of my brothers-in-law in New York. On the very sidewalk lay precious things such as I only wish you could have on your table for the holidays. It's only too bad that people step all over them with their feet. And there are golden mirrors here that reach to the ceiling. And there isn't a trace of a lamp in all New York. And at night you press the wall, and a lot of moons in glass cases light up, just like on the ship on which we came across. . . ."

+ "Well!" interrupts Mottel. "What do you think of that? Ha? . . ."

"Do you hear?" adds Mirke, and her whole countenance is one smile of exaltation.

"My, my! Ay, ay!" chorus the listeners.

Mottel resumes his reading:

"And the walls here are so red and velvety. I touched one of them, and it's so soft and even, and I thought to myself: 'I hope I had a cloak made of it!' "

"She knows what's good to have!" called one of the women shopkeepers.

"And as for eating," the letter went on, "they eat of the very best here. They don't lack even bird's milk! Roast hens in the middle of the week and so many other dainty dishes that I don't know how to name them. . . ."

"There's a Rothschild existence for you!" interjects Mottel once more, continuing to read:

"And the buildings in New York are so high that even when you turn back your neck you can barely see the roof. And over the roofs there fly machines filled with people, and the people aren't at all afraid, and my brothers-in-law tell me that none of the machines has ever fallen down. . . ."

"My, my! Heavens! Ay, ay!"

"—And they rented a home for us in which even a count might live. Six rooms in a fine building. And in three of the rooms, on the floor they've laid down a kind of oil-cloth with such nice squares, and

in the hall on the floor they put a big piece of velvet with flowers painted on it. I don't let anybody into the house, because I don't want them to step on it. Then I've got chairs, a bureau and what not else, which they sent in. It simply dazzles your eyes to look at them. And mother-in-law is living with us. And there's water in our home. All you have to do is turn a faucet and water comes from the wall. And you don't need any lamps, either, for when you want light, you simply turn a sort of screw and you bring a match close to it and it gets light. And there's no oven here, either. When you wish to cook you turn another screw, and pretty soon the stove is hot and you put your pots on top of it and you make the finest dishes. And my brothers-in-law have taken Orre into their iron factory, where they make iron ceilings and stairs for the buildings, and they pay him, thank God, twenty dollars a week. In our money that's every bit of forty rubles."

"Listen, folks! Just listen to that!" cries one of the women. "I could pinch my cheeks. . . ."

"Read on, Reb Mottel!" urges Mirke with ardor, drying her eyes.

Mottel continues:

"Yes, where was I? 'In our money that's every bit of forty rubles. And later, say my brothers-in-law, he'll get even more.' "

Mirke can no longer restrain her sobs.

"Well? Ha? Well?"

"—I hope to God that I'll be able to send for all of you, and bring you across. And my brothers-in-law tell me that in New York there are a good many Jewish policemen, too. . . ."

"That's so," cries Mottel. "I heard that long ago,—that Jews over there have equal rights!"

"Really?" asks one. "And they have Jewish policemen there, too?"

"What do you think?" shouts Mottel in reply, his voice ringing with confidence. "Even Jewish intelligence-officers. . . ."

"You don't say!"

"It would pay to pawn our wives and children and take a trip over there!" jests one of the men.

"And the men, too!" retorts one of the women. "But I'm afraid Berel-Itsye the money-lender wouldn't advance a groschen on them."

The rest of the women burst into laughter.

"Unless the Gentile butcher would give something for them as impure meat," ¹ suggests another woman.

"Shoo, ladies!" exclaims a shopkeeper, and waves his hands at them as if he were driving geese along.

The laughter waxes louder. Both the women and the men are now guffawing.

Mirke now stands with the letter in her hand, taking

¹ I. e., not kosher; a pun upon the meaning of impure as referring also to meat not prepared according to the dietary laws of Moses.

no part in the general merriment. She feels provoked that they should not now be talking of her daughter's good fortune. For a moment she remains thus, then she remarks:

"And I, fool that I was, tried to keep her from going! . . ."

Nobody notices her reflection. Out of envy, they all pretend not to have heard anything that she had said. So she approaches close to one of the women with whom she is wont to quarrel all the year long,—Elke, the daughter of Chaye-Dvoshe, a gaunt woman with a crooked nose, wearing a white bonnet under a red, flowery kerchief,—thinking to herself, "Let her burst with envy!" and she says:

"What do you say to that, Elke? Such a fool I was trying to hold her back. . . ."

"You never can tell," replies Elke maliciously. "Maybe your heart told you that she ought not to go? Maybe. . . . Who knows what misfortune may yet befall her there! . . ."

Mirke, flaming with rage, almost jumps upon her.

"Tfu! Tfu! Tfu!" She spits out thrice. "On your head! May it befall your own wicked person! You crooked serpent, you! Burst with envy! Explode with jealousy! Aha! Who's daughter has a husband that makes forty rubles a week? Aha? Burst! Burst! Burst!"

And she dashes into her shop. Elke replies with a

volley of curses. The other women set up a clamor. The men hold their sides with laughter, while Mottel cries: "Livelier, Elke, livelier!"

"Hush! Here comes the lord with the brass buttons! . . ."

The sergeant issues forth from the apothecary's, stops and eyes the crowd around the shops.

And when the sergeant disappears, Mottel cries to one of his neighbors, in a voice breathless with wonder:

"And in America there are even Jewish policemen. There's no grief of Exile over there. Full rights. . . ."

For the next few weeks there was talk of this letter all over the town, and of the "full rights," and on a certain Saturday morning, when Mottel caught hold of little Shlayme in the synagogue and asked him: "Well, youngster, are you going to sail to America, too?" Shlayme replied, "You bet! I'll be a policeman there! . . ."

At about this time Sholom the Gentile entered the home of Shmeril the cobbler, whistled mysteriously and held out both his hands.

Shmerel happened to be holding a shoe in his lap, heel upwards, and his mouth was filled with wooden nails; he stared at Sholom in amazement, removed the nails from between his lips and asked, quietly:

"What's the matter?"

"From Broche . . ." he managed to utter in a stifled voice, making a pitiable attempt to smile.

"She is . . . phew! . . ."

Again he whistled and brandished his arms.

"Well, what about your Broche? Speak. . . ."

"Sailed for America yesterday."

"America? Your Broche? . . ."

"Yes, yes. Broche, my Broche. . . . She fell in love, in the city, with a rascal of a salesman and he turned her head with stories of America, and go try to talk her out of it! . . . I and my wife Gittel rushed to the city, begged of her, wept before her: 'What do you mean by this sudden craze for America? To forsake your father and mother, your brothers and sisters,—the whole world? What do you mean by it, the devil take your father? Haven't you any pity?' . . . But you might as well have spoken to the wall! She went away! And my Gittel came back from the city half dead; she could scarcely drag her feet along. She just left for the burial-ground, to pray at her mother's grave. . . . Oh, may she at least arrive there in safety. . . . Did you ever hear such a tale, Shmeril? It's a terrible blow. Come, let's have a glass of brandy! . . ."

Shmeril arose, shook out his black apron with his black, grimy hands, and said:

"Drinking a glass of brandy is by no means the

most foolish thing a fellow can do! But that you should be sorry to have her go, my friend,—now *that's* folly! I've been thinking this America over, and it seems to me that it's not a bad place to go to."

"Are you crazy, Shmeril? What are you talking about?"

"Just what you hear! I have heard about America for a long time, and that it's possible to work yourself up to something over there. And ever since Mirke's daughter Leah went there and sends such letters from her place, I can't get America out of my mind. I keep thinking all the time: Shmerel, what will all your striving here come to? You've got four sons and three daughters. The sons—one of them is going around altogether idle until he'll be taken away as a soldier; one is a tinsmith, earns twice nothing, not even enough to provide water for porridge; the third calls himself a dealer, and makes nary a groschen from his business; and the fourth, may the devil seize him!—I taught him the cobbler's trade, and he's as much a cobbler as I am a Rabbi. Every day he catches a blow with the bootleg from me. Is that any prospect for me? Maybe things would turn out altogether differently over there? They say that America is a great country, even vaster than Russia. . . . If it was all right for the Jew to travel deep into Russia, why not yonder? . . ."

"But deep Russia isn't under the earth. . . ."

"Much that should worry you. . . . Isn't it true that there's bread and something to chew there? And that you don't have to worry about your sons? And that Jews have full rights? And that you don't have to give girls a dowry when they marry? Then who cares whether it's in the earth or under the earth, as long as it's a merry life over there?"

"And how about my never seeing my Broche again, and her never being able to see me again, and not even my grave, when I die? Ha?" asked Sholom with deep gloom.

"Well, isn't it possible that you and your family will sail there sometime?"

"I? You're talking like a fool, indeed, Shmeril! I wouldn't go there even if I knew that I'd get rich yonder. Here in the village my father lived,—my grandfather and my great-great-grandfather, may they add to my years, and they lie in our graveyard here, and there I, too, shall lie, in a hundred and twenty years. . . ."

They entered a tavern and ordered a half-quart. After they had drained the contents, Sholom became gloomier than ever; he beat himself over the heart and sobbed:

"She was the apple of my eye, and now I'll never see her again. . . ."

Shmeril, on the other hand, became lighter-hearted

than before, and suddenly bent over toward Sholom, and whispered a secret:

“I’m selling my place and getting ready to go to America with my two oldest sons and Chyenke. May we both so truly enjoy long life as I’m telling you the truth. . . .”

And his words were accompanied by a powerful blow across the shoulder with his black, grimy palm.

XX

THE VILLAGE WANES

TWO weeks later the village again seethed with news from America. Mirke's son, the soldier, had left for America from the city where he had served, and Sholom, moreover, had received a very enthusiastic letter from his daughter Broche, saying that she and her husband were working in a shirt factory and were earning "big money." Now it was Sholom who ran with Broche's letter from shop to shop on the market-place and to the synagogue, handing it to everybody to read, smiling with intense satisfaction, while the assembled hearers broke into exclamations of wonder and smacked their lips. . . . The village was now more than ever filled with dreams of America. Fathers and mothers looked furtively upon their grown-up sons, whispering to each other mysteriously. Chayke, Mottel's daughter, secretly wrote a letter to her former chum Leah, asking her for advice as to whether she, too, should travel thither or not. She gave the letter to Mirke to send away together with her own. And Shmeril the cobbler really sold his home and place of business. . . .

It was a cold, cheerless, rainy day shortly after the Rejoicing of the Law. At the Jewish graveyard stood Shmeril the cobbler before a grave, leaning against a tombstone; close by were his two oldest sons, and the three of them were gulping down their tears. Beautiful Chyenke, with a large kerchief thrown across her shoulders, lay upon a grave and wailed aloud:

“Mama! Mama! I and your sons Yoshke and Layzer are forsaking you. We are journeying all the way to America, very far from here. Darling little mother! Oh, mother of my heart, intercede with God for us, and entreat Him that your children may not, God forbid, be lost upon the way! . . .

At these words Shmeril suddenly burst forth into sobs that sounded like the bellowing of an ox; he cast himself prone upon the grave and shuddered all over. Round about moaned the autumn wind, and the trees, from which the last leaves had fallen upon the graves below, swayed and groaned in the rain.

When Chyenke rose from her mother's grave and placed the large kerchief over her shapely head, Shmeril bent over the mound, gazed at it and was silent for a long time, unable to speak. He could only move his lips. Soon, however, his children heard his choking voice:

“Zelde. . . . Our little children, our tender little children. . . . I told them to go. . . . You under-

stand our position exactly, don't you? . . . Four sons. . . . What will become of them here? Is there any future for them? And the girls? A dowry? A curse. And one of them is taller than the next. How can a father keep an eye on them? Yonder God will send them husbands, and they won't have to bring a groschen with them. . . . Zelde, let them journey thither in the best of health. Well, how can we help ourselves, you little goose? Not pleasant, is it? What can we do? . . . We must suffer for the children of our flesh and blood, silly woman! . . . Do your best for them there! Win them a bit of luck. And if God will only help them yonder, they'll send money for a new tombstone for you. . . . Zelde, I entreat you, you're their own mother, do your best for them! . . ."

Two days later, when Chyenke and her two brothers were already seated upon Chayim the commissioner's wagon, which was to take them to the city, whence they were to leave for America, the entire village gathered about the vehicle. Chyenke kissed all the women and girls farewell. And Mirke cried to her: "Don't forget, my dear little Chyenke, in the name of the Lord, to remember me to my children. I've given you their address!" And Chayke shouted to her: "Tell them in America that I'll soon be there, too!" And from the other maidens came a similar chorus: "Here's hoping to meet you in good season,

in America!" Shmeril alone stood beside the wagon, silent in the midst of the tumult.

And when his children had once again kissed him good-by, he was still unable to muster a sound, and could only sigh through his nose and bite his lips.

When the wagon began to move, however, he started after it, running along with uncertain step, suddenly stopping and gazing after the vehicle with moist eyes, mumbling strangely. And when the wagon and his children had disappeared into the autumn fog he turned to a group of men and women that had remained nearby, talking about America, stretched forth both his grimy hands and exclaimed in agitation:

"Maybe . . . ha? . . . Maybe I shouldn't have let them go, ha? Done! . . . They're gone! . . . Too late! . . . Children. . . . Own flesh and blood. . . . Three limbs sundered at a blow. . . . Ha?"

And with wavering gait and lowered head he walked off.

Across the heavens wandered spiritless clouds. A cold drizzle began to descend upon the village. Life in the woods was languishing; life in the village had withered. . . .

Ah, what a celebration there was at Shmeril the cobbler's when he received his first letter from

America! This occurred two months later; the village was bedecked with snow and the sky overhead glowed red with the frost.

His children wrote that Broche and her sweetheart had taken them into the shirt-factory, where they were each earning, thank God, more than they had ever expected: Yoshke, seven dollars, which meant fourteen rubles, per week. Layzer six dollars and Chyenke seven dollars, too. At the same time they wrote that Broche and her sweetheart were making even more, and that Leah, Mirke's daughter, was becoming a wealthy woman altogether, because her husband was working for his rich brothers. And Leah's brother, too,—the one that had been a soldier—had advanced to a good position. He too, worked in the factory owned by Leah's brothers-in-law, and was drawing good wages. In fact, people said it was as high as twenty-four rubles per week.

For sheer joy Shmeril did not work all day. He hunted up Sholom the Gentile, and after having drunk each other's health more than once, they sauntered off toward Mirke's shop, for they felt that a kind of relationship now existed between her and them. America had created the bonds. Mirke called in Motel and he read the letter for her, whereupon Mirke summoned the rest of the shopkeepers, while Mottel had to read the letter a second time, for the benefit of the entire assembly. Mirke's countenance shone

with exaltation, and she cried out enthusiastically: "Well, ha? Well, ha? Now do you believe that my daughter, long life to her, has become a rich woman yonder?" And Shmeril the cobbler drunkenly slapped every man upon the shoulder, laughing and shouting: "I'm going to sail there, too, with all my family, may you and I so truly live happily!" And Sholom, himself a little the worse for brandy, shouted even louder than Shmeril: "But what do you say to my Broche? And I didn't care to let her go. Ah, the devil take my father and my grandfather!"

And once again the shopkeepers shook their heads in wonderment, smacked their lips and uttered expressions of amazement, and they were all envious of Mirke, Shmeril and Sholom. Almost every one of them thought to himself: "I ought to send my children yonder! . . ."

Just before Passover the first money arrived in the village from America. Shmeril received fifteen rubles; Sholom, ten; Mirke, twenty-five, together with a letter from Leah, saying that she was soon sending out two tickets and a little extra money, that Mirke's two other grown-up daughters might come to America. This caused the greatest commotion that the village had yet known, and fanned the flames of enthusiasm for the New World. To the inhabitants of the place, who waited all year long for the day of the fair as the one opportunity of making any money, America

now appeared in the light of a vast, continuous fair that lasted the entire year. Mottel gave expression to the selfsame idea:

“Over here our eyes creep out of our heads before the day of the fair comes round again, and the way it seems, over there it’s fair-day every day, and people know what money looks like.”

On a beautiful day shortly after Shabuoth (Pentecost) the Jewish graveyard once more resounded with feminine lamentations. On one of the graves lay Mirke, entreating her mother with loud wailing to intercede for her two other daughters, who were to venture the voyage over vast seas and endless deserts. On another grave lay Nahum’s wife, tearing the bonnet from her head, beating upon the mound with both her fists, moaning horribly: “Mama! Mama, they’re taking my little Chayke, the crown of my head, away to America!” Further on were three more women, kneeling over mounds and naming America in their complaints, and one of them cursed America with bitter imprecations: “Oh, that America might have been drowned beneath a deluge before it was ever discovered; then my Rachel, the apple of my eye, wouldn’t be dragging her youthful bones thither, woe is her mother! . . .”

The months speed by, one after the other. The years flow by, one after the other. And the living

stream from the village to America still flows along, stronger and more impetuous than ever. One draws the other along, one follows the other—sisters, brothers, children, parents. . . . Yonder, in that unknown land, the Jew may prosper; he enjoys full rights; there his children may make a place for themselves,—both his sons and his daughters. . . .

Here and there upon the market-place stands a closed shop, like a tombstone for the people who lived and labored there year after year. Under the shelter opposite the stores no longer may be seen Rashke the widow before her counter of dainties, Yoche the soldier's wife with her doughnuts, Bayle the crooked-nose with her kvass. They have all gone to join their children in America. There are but few children to be found upon the streets. Rarely may one encounter a grown-up girl. And the young men that are to be met appear altogether different—livelier, merrier. Here and there a youth has shorn his temple-looks and strolls about with a cane. And when the villagers catch sight of such a fellow, they can tell from his shorn locks and his cane that he is preparing to sail to America.

A gaunt, tall Jew with a yellow goatee goes about the village, looking distractedly in all directions. Old Chayim the commissioner halts him:

“Where are you coming from, Zelig? . . .”

“Just been to the graveyard, Reb Chayim. . . .

Said farewell. Who knows whether I'll ever see my parents' grave again?" he replies, gloomily and in a preoccupied manner.

"When are you leaving?"

"To-morrow, with God's help."

He sighs, looks about in all directions, up to the sky and down upon the earth, as if he would like to suck the whole village into his being and take it with him. Then he continues, while a deep yearning rings in his voice:

"I didn't care to go. I really didn't. It's so hard to tear yourself away from home. True, we never licked honey here, the Lord be praised. But a home is a home after all. My great-grandfather was born in this village. Why, Reb Chayim, it's even hard to wrest a cat or a dog from a home in which it has grown up. Then you can imagine how it is for a man, may heaven pardon the comparison. . . . But what's a fellow to do? My children, long life to them, are over there, and I am drawn to their side. . . ."

"Yes," answers old Chayim, sighing, "a fellow does feel like being with his children. Without children, you're like a withered tree whose branches have been lopped off and whose leaves have fallen to the ground. But I have no desire to join my children over there. I'm almost seventy, Zelig, with one foot in the next

world. . . . If I were as young as you, perhaps I'd go, too. Well, let them be happy there without me. Thank God, at least, that they are doing well and that they think of me now and then. Every month I receive some money from them, thank God. Well, may you have a pleasant voyage, Zelig. May God land you there safe and sound."

"Good-by, Reb Chayim. . . ."

"Wait a moment, Zelig! I have a request to make. I have already written to my son David-Layb about it, as a matter of fact, but it won't do any harm if you call it to his attention again. Tell him not to forget that his father, his grandfather (may he rest in peace) and all our ancestors, were upright, pious Jews, and that he shall see to it, in God's name, that his children be God-fearing Jews as well. Tell him that, Zelig, because he writes me that his children go to school there. . . . You understand, don't you?"

He shakes his hoary head sadly, and sighs again. Zelig replies, too, with a sigh:

"I'll surely tell him, Reb Chayim. Good-by."

"Farewell. . . ."

A pale little child of six, with his flapping shirt-tail soiled, is standing and holding converse with a little girl of his own age who has black curly locks and large, dark eyes.

"Etta, aha, I have a brand new suit."

"Where is it? . . ."

"In the house. In the closet. Mama says I'll put it on when we get to America, aha! . . ."

"And my mother'll buy me a new pair of shoes and a new dwess in Amewica," she gurgles. "Itsye, wi' you pway wi' me when we get to Amewica?"

"Yes. And every day I'll give you a piece of pretzel."

"And sugar cakes, too?"

"Yes, sugar-cakes, too."

"A whole one, Itsikl?"

"A piece. Here, such a big piece," and he indicates the length of the piece on his finger.

"That's fine." She is content.

And thus one familiar face disappeared after the other from the village, even as leaves in autumn, or as forest-life during a storm in fall. Shmeril the cobbler had long ago sailed for America with all his children. Mirke, her husband, and the rest of her children journeyed thither likewise. Only old Avrom-Layzer was left. Mottel and his entire household had already gone. Even the village teacher had left for America in company of a girl. Berel-Itsye the money-lender moved to another town, for America had ruined his business. The apothecary, too, was preparing to move, and the sergeant was not at all

pleased with America's ever having been discovered. . . .

With the exception of Sholom the Gentile, only old men and their wives were left in the village, and all of them lived upon the money that they received from America. . . .

A few more years passed by. It was a beautiful day after the close of Shabuoth,—the annual fair-day. The village was silent; for the fair, too, had moved to another town. The market-place looked like a graveyard; the boarded shops appeared to be tombstones. Under the shelter lay some goats, and a big hog was rubbing his hide against the wall.

The rustling of the woods was audible, and the twittering of birds, as from a silent burial-ground. Aged men and women tottered about the village, bent over and treading as softly as they sighed. Some of them thought of the fair that once upon a time was held here upon this day, and they groaned:

“Our poor village has crumbled to ruins! . . .”

The entire village, indeed, might well have been compared to a Home for the Aged, where old folks waited for their death. . . . From the house in which dwelt Avrom-Layzer came the sounds of his pious chanting.

On his turf-mound sat Sholom the Gentile, with his

wife Gittel, and both were examining the photograph of their second grandchild, which their daughter Broche had sent them. Gittel was sobbing.

"If I had wings, I would fly to them there. I would run there on foot, just to have a look at them. . . ."

"Bah, woman!" grumbled Sholom. Then she starts crying again. "Such a pretty little doll of a grandchild! We ought to rejoice over it,—not weep!"

"But I'd like to see him with my own eyes, woe is me! Behold him, hear him call me grandma, misfortune is me! . . ."

"Indeed. . . . When it comes to wishing, I'd like it myself!"

He heaved a sigh.

"Sholom, what is our life without our children?"

"A pinch of snuff, Gittel. . . ."

"If you take a cat's kittens away, she whines and looks everywhere for them. . . ."

"True, Gittel. But such is our fate, so don't prattle in vain. . . ."

He stood up, with the photograph in his hand, looked at it once more and suddenly smacked his lips at it:

"Ah, you little rascal! You don't know me, ha? I'm your granddad, my boy! . . ."

He chuckled softly, wiped a tear from his eye with his bare hand, and entered the house.

Gittel remained seated upon the turf-mound and wept in silence.

Lame Gedaliah was limping from house to house with a letter in his hand, begging to be told the meaning of certain words it contained. He went into Avrom-Layzer, who was seated at the table reciting Psalms.

"Tell me, pray, Reb Avrom-Layzer; your children write often; maybe you know the meaning of 'I am all-right?'" . . .

The old man merely shrugged his shoulders and continued his reading with a dreary chant. Then Gedaliah hastened off to the old Rabbi with the letter, but not even this worthy could tell him the meaning of "all right." . . .

Later the men repaired silently to the synagogues, with subdued sighs, and prayed there in old, cracked voices, with bloodless lips. Not a fresh, youthful voice was to be heard, as if only the shadows of the living worshiped there. . . .

And between the afternoon and the evening prayers they conversed about their children, their grandchildren, their daughters-in-law, whom they did not know; of their unknown sons-in-law, of the generations that had sprung from them, in that remote land beyond all the seas,—so far, so far from them, and yet so near; and they sighed, and yearned, yearned. . . .

Once the aged Rabbi sent for several men and announced to them in a sad voice:

"Fellow Jews, I have just received a letter with terrible tidings. Our people is being massacred. Pogroms. To-morrow we must have a general fast. . . ."

All the Jews in the village fasted and chanted Psalms. And fearing a pogrom in the village, the Rabbi and two other elders went to the sergeant.

"Don't be afraid," replied the official. "There will be no pogrom here. Who is there to attack? . . ."

As they left the sergeant, the Rabbi said:

"Gentlemen, perhaps God really created America to rescue Jews from pogroms, ha? . . ."

Old Avrom-Layzer died. All the inhabitants of the village thronged to the burial-ground; only old men and women were there. Over the place hovered an autumnal mist; the wind howled through the dying trees and the rain came pouring down. The aged folk bemoaned the passing of the elder, and each of them thought, despairingly:

"To think of it! Ah! None of his children was with him at his death and none at his burial. And who will there be at ours, ha? Who?"

The old Rabbi, in his stifled voice, filled with tears, said prayers over Avrom-Layzer's grave.

Suddenly the bell of the Polish church began to toll. Ding, dong! Ding, dong! And the metallic

tones reverberated over the dead village, mingled with the fog, with the rain, were wafted to the Jewish graveyard and echoed with a hopeless groan in the souls of all the sad, abandoned aged folk who were gathered about the fresh grave:

“Ame-ri-ca! Ah! Ame-ri-ca! Ah!” it rang.

Was it the groaning of the old folks’ souls, or the tolling of the bell?

Somewhere in Lithuania there once nestled the village of B——

Written in Brooklyn, N. Y., 1914.

THE END

